

ACROSS IOWA IN 'FORTY-NINE

by
Theo. C. Ressler

It is hard to imagine, in light of the one hundred and twenty-five years which have passed, how exciting the first news of the gold strike in California must have been to the people of Iowa. Few young men were immune to the call of adventure and many Iowans were stricken with gold fever from the first notice. Jacob Y. Stover, twenty-five years old and living with his parents on a farm in Johnson County, reacted in what must have been a typical way. Writing his account some forty years later, he recalled the experience vividly:

It was in November, 1848—I remember the time of day—that I first heard of the gold fields of California. I came in from gathering corn to dinner. Mother told me there had been a peddler there that day who had told her that there had been wonderful gold mines found in California. We were sitting at the dinner table when she was telling it. I said, "I am going."

"How are you going to go two or three thousand miles? It takes money to go there, to go to New York and around the Horn; but," she said, "some say you can cross over the plains."

"That is the way I am going."

Stover joined a group of fellow gold-seekers which was organizing in the state

capital, Iowa City. This Iowa City group, later called the "Sacramento Mining Company," set out in the spring of 1849 to seek fortune in the gold hills of California. Hundreds of thousands of others were doing the same all across the eastern half of the continent. This is the story of how the group formed, and how it covered the first leg of the trip, across Iowa to the "jumping-off place" on the Missouri River. While it did not have the rugged challenges of the journey across the plains or the mountains, the Iowa trip was nevertheless a major undertaking.

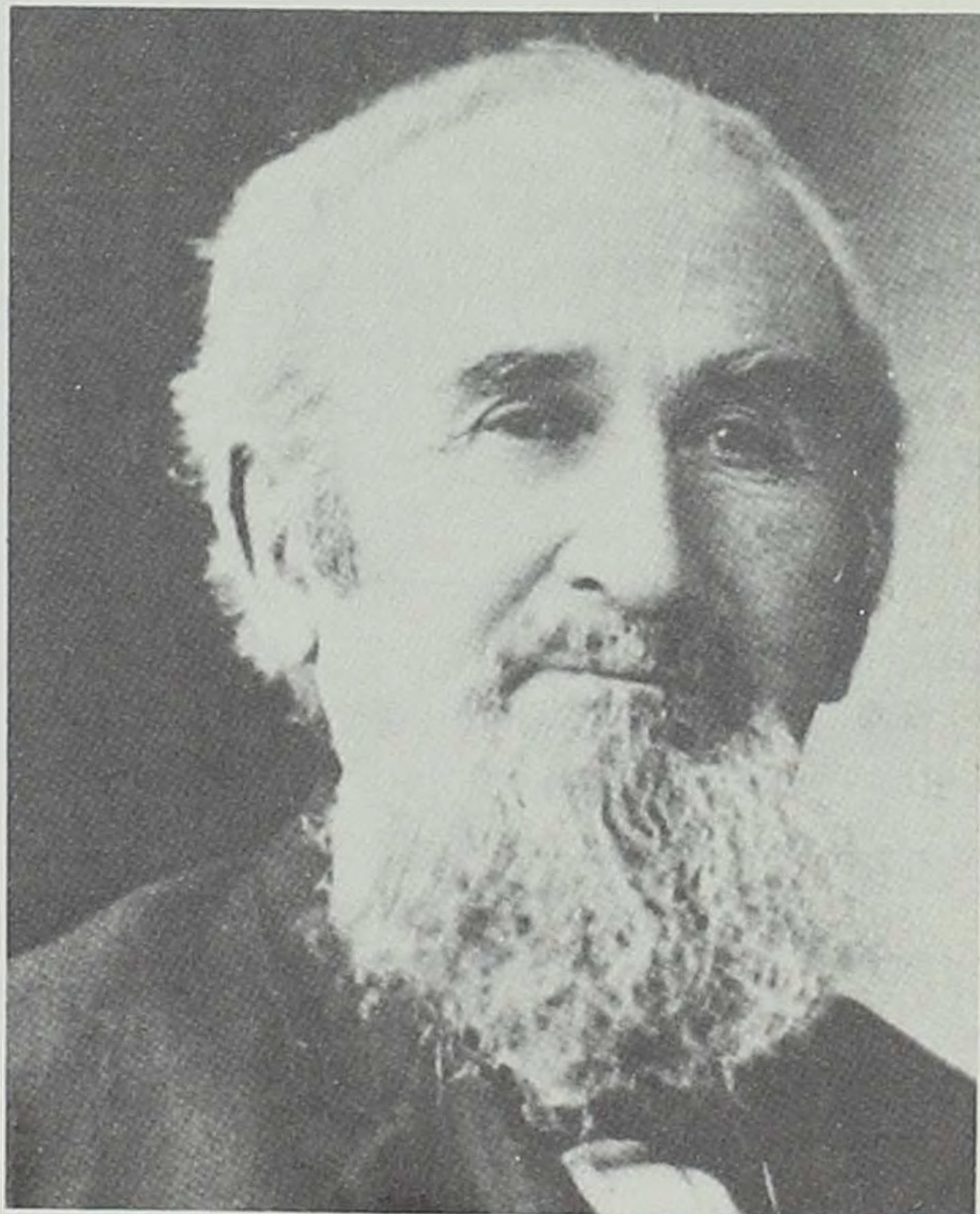
The first problem facing the "Argonauts" as they were called, was the matter of organization. Even though some undertook the trip west on their own, most Forty-niners banded together for economy and mutual assistance. Anticipation of the dangers which might lie ahead on the overland journey to California prompted the gold-seekers to place emphasis on organization into large companies. The chief hazard of the trip was supposed to be the possibility of Indian attack. Despite the fact that this threat seldom materialized, the Argonauts wanted to be prepared, and so sought safety in numbers.

Generally speaking, Forty-niner expeditions were formed in units recruited from one locality. Within a small area, communication between prospective members was a relatively simple matter, facilitating the scheduling of meetings and announcing the final notices of starting plans. Were it not for Iowa City's peculiar

status as capital of the state of Iowa, the Johnson County group might have been composed exclusively of local friends and associates. However, when the expedition was being planned, the Second General Assembly was in session, and meeting at Iowa City. It was natural, then, that at least some of the visiting legislators should attend the capital city's meetings.

On January 13, 1849, the Iowa City company was formally organized when a group of twenty-nine prospective companions signed a statement of intent, or "compact," as they called it. It appears that this document was the outcome of several previous meetings. Among the legislators, John J. Selman, President of the Senate, and Loring Wheeler, senator from Clinton and Scott counties, joined the group, thus proving that even politicians were not immune to the California fever. The group also elected officers, a common practice among such companies. Dr. William McCormick was to be president, C. C. Catlett was secretary, and A. H. Palmer was to fulfill the duties of corresponding secretary. G. W. Hess had previously been appointed along with Catlett and Palmer to draw up a set of rules. The articles of the compact were a bit vague, but did reflect the fraternal spirit of the trail:

We the undersigned, for the purpose of forming an association to emigrate to California, early in the ensuing spring, do hereby agree and solemnly pledge ourselves to, and with each other mutually to start, proceed, and emigrate thither together, at such time and by such route



Jacob Y. Stover

as may be deemed expedient, and also to aid, protect and defend each other to the utmost of our abilities, in the enjoyment of life, liberty and security in the privileges and possessions of each respectively, under any circumstances, both on the route to and after arrival in California; to the faithful performance of which compact, according to its letter and spirit, we do hereby severally pledge to each other our sacred honor.

Despite the high ideals of the compact, there is considerable doubt that even the original twenty-nine signers made the trip. Since more than a century has passed, it is unlikely that anyone will ever know the complete roster of the final group, but evidence suggests that many who agreed to the compact defected before the group

got underway. It is doubtful, for example, that John J. Selman made the journey.

On a more practical note, the agreement called for the recruitment of a company to total one hundred persons. To reach the goal it was decided to issue invitations to neighboring communities urging the formation of an all-Iowa company. Notices appeared in several newspapers, and personal solicitation was probably used by the plan's supporters to bring their friends into the Iowa City organization. The attempt to recruit other Iowa communities under the all-Iowa plan met with only limited success. Evidence suggests that the Johnson County company was supplemented by recruits

from other counties further east, namely, Cedar, Clinton, Jackson, and Jones.

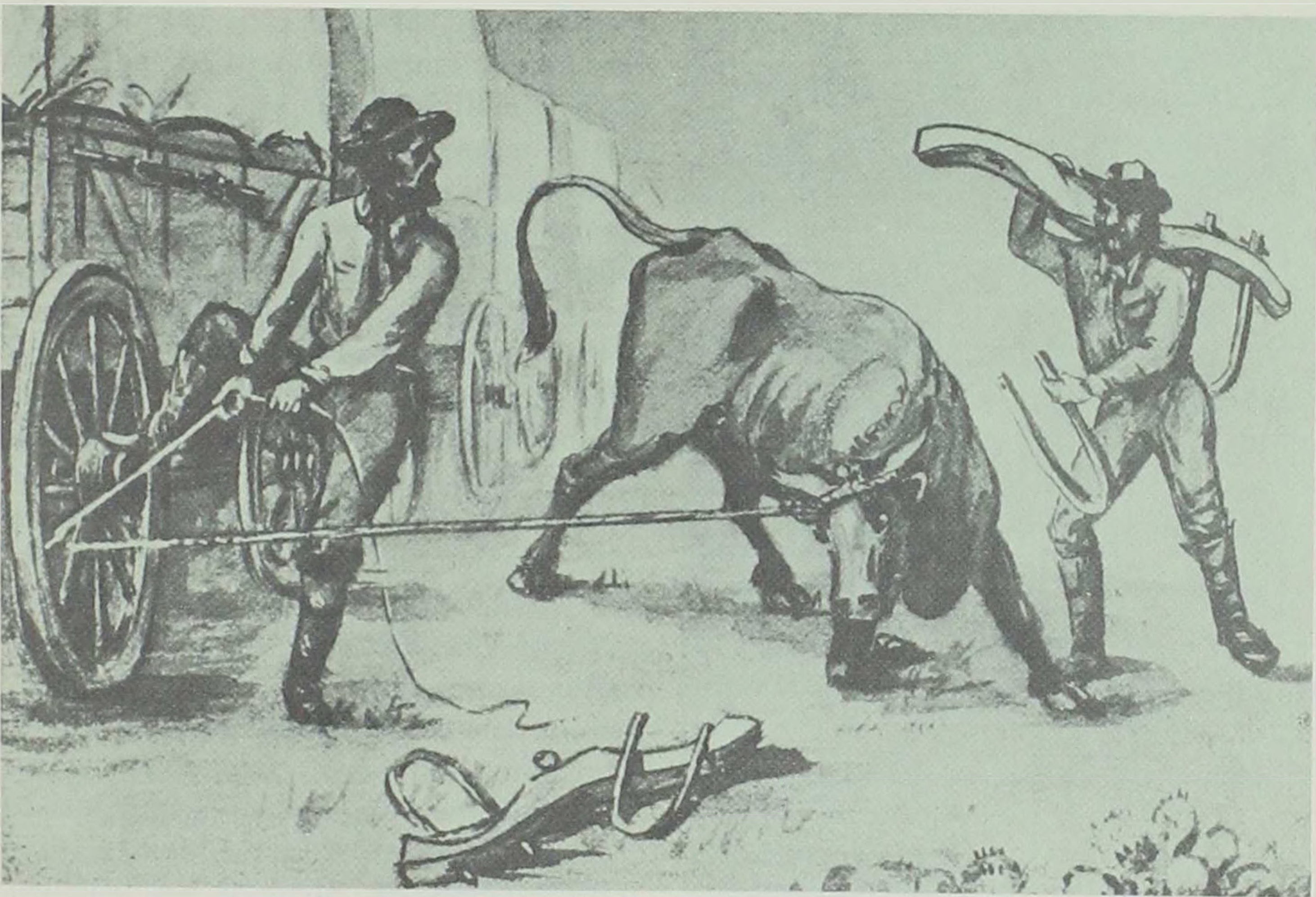
The final figure was probably short of the stated goal of one hundred. C. C. Catlett recorded in a letter that after the first defections the group consisted of "29 wagons, 72 men, four ladies and three children." Unfortunately, all we can say is that the group was somewhat cosmopolitan in makeup, representing different areas and people from many walks of life, and that it reached its greatest size at the Missouri River crossing. Several accounts by members survive, notably those of Stover, Catlett, Abraham Owen, J. J. Ressler, Aylett Cotton, and others. It is from these that we can follow the group west.

The Iowa City company was careful to organize the outfitting and equipping of the train. A report was drawn up and endorsed which specified the requirements of the trip, both as to quantity and quality. Included were recommendations on teams, wagons, food provisions, arms and ammunition, tools, cooking utensils, tents, and bedding. The estimated cost of the suggested outfit was \$300. Thus equipped, the company expected to cover 2100 miles in 140 days, at an average of fifteen miles per day.

The most important items on the list were the draft animals. Other equipment could be discarded or easily replaced if it was inappropriate, but the teams were crucial to the success of the expedition. Of the three choices of animals, oxen, horses, or mules, the Iowa City company chose the former. The report stated:

The teams of said expedition shall consist, as per resolution, of oxen and cows, which are required to be in good condition, and sound, not under four nor over

This article is part of a longer work on the Iowa City Company and relies on several reminiscent narratives of the 1849 experience. The narrative of Jacob Y. Stover, entitled "History of the Sacramento Mining Company of 1849 by One of its Number Jacob Y. Stover," is perhaps the most complete and is used by permission of S. Emma Stover. Portions of the Stover material were published in John Walton Caughey (ed.), "The Jacob Y. Stover Narrative," *Pacific Historical Review*, 6 (1937), 166-181. The story according to John Jacob Ressler comes from two manuscript sources: "John Jacob Ressler's Trip to California in 1849," a compilation by Ressler's daughter Cora Ressler Smith, made on information from her father in 1900; and "A 49-er John Jacob Ressler," a manuscript based on notes made by Sarah Von Stein from a conversation with Ressler on August 25, 1903. Abraham Owen's reminiscence is found in M. Etta Cartwright Coxe, "Hon. A. Owen, Reminiscences of His Early Life and Pioneer Days," *North English (Iowa) Record* (December 3, 1903), and in biographical and autobiographical materials of Abraham Owen assembled by his granddaughter, Sena Ellen Owen, and loaned to the author by Ada Owen Rathjen. Aylett R. Cotton dictated his story in 1903 as "Across the Plains to California in 1849," which correlates with Cotton's letter published in the Ft. Des Moines *Iowa Star* (July 26, 1849). All of these accounts are reproduced in my limited publication work, "Trails Divided" (1964), a copy of which is in the State Historical Society Library. An indispensable source for newspaper accounts is Fred Lorch, "Iowa and the California Gold Rush of 1849," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 30, 3 (July 1932), 307-376. Chauncey Swan's letters to his wife Mary were published in Mildred Throne (ed.), "Letters of a Forty-Niner," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 47, 1 (January 1949), 63-77. Also useful is Catherine M. Haun's account, "A Woman's Trip Across the Plains in 1849," which was dictated to her daughter and used by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Reconstruction of the Iowa route was aided by William J. Petersen's "The Mormon Trail of 1846," *The Palimpsest*, 37, 11 (November 1956), 513-527.

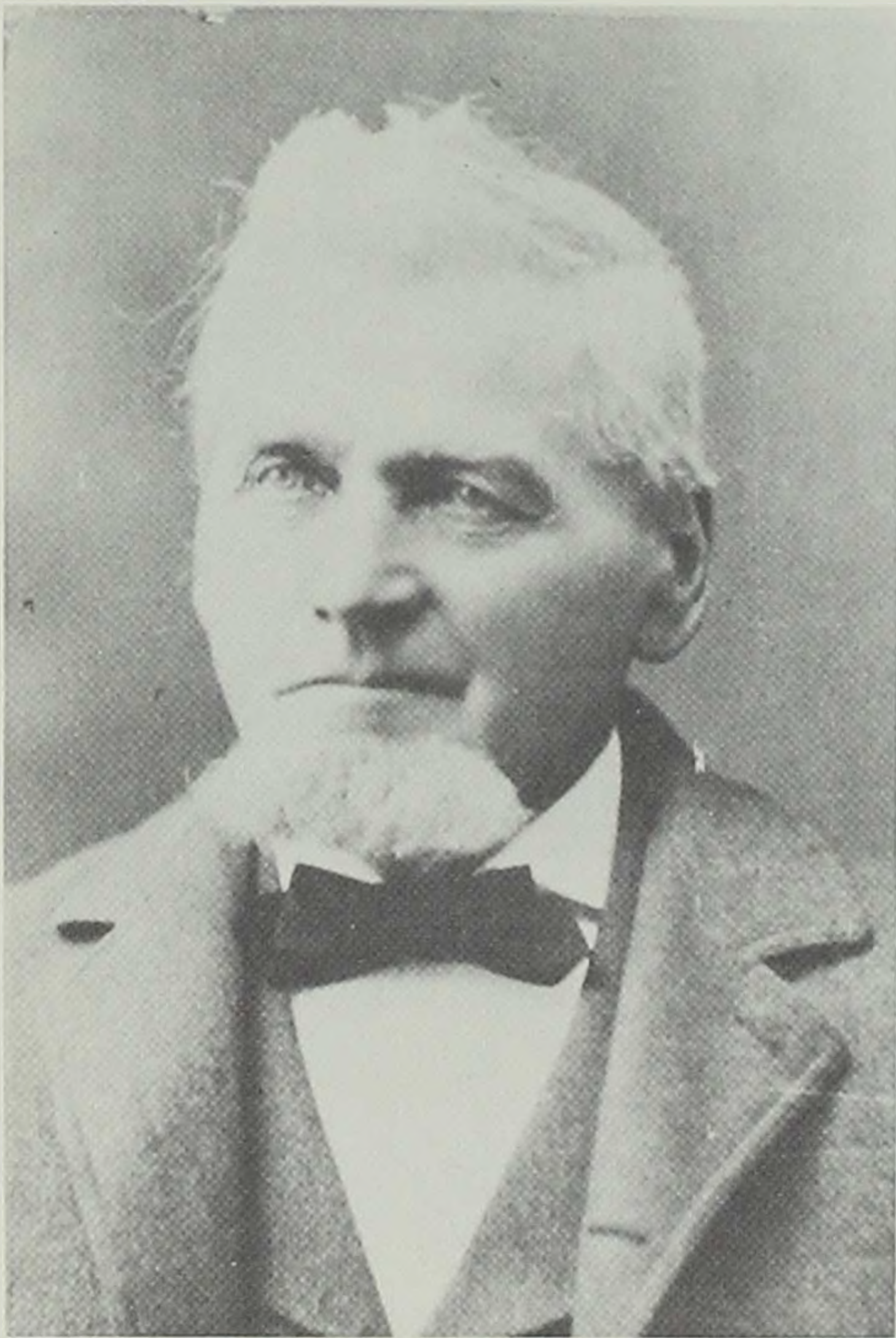


Yoking up the oxen (William H. Jackson sketch).

seven years old. Each team shall be provided with at least one extra yoke, a full set of bows, rings, staples, and staple keys, and one full set shoes fitted, add nails for shoeing.

Although some Forty-niners in general favored mules as draft animals, the consensus of opinion was in favor of oxen. The general term which applied to both sexes of the bovine family of domesticated animals in question was "cattle." The young offspring were calves—females were heifers until after producing and rearing their first offspring, after which they were known as cows. Since only a proportionately small number of males was needed for reproduction, most bulls were castrated at an early age to make them more docile, also to make their meat more tasteful. Males so treated were

called "steers" when raised primarily for food. When kept longer to serve as beasts of burden, they were known as "oxen," especially after they attained maximum size. Both oxen and cows were used to draw wagons across the plains. However, cows performed another service as well—that of supplying milk for those traveling in the wagon trains. To produce butter and buttermilk the travelers hung a pail of milk on the wagon. The jostling it got on the rough trail supplied the "churning." Because of their role as milk producers and because of their smaller size the cows were often spared the yoke and were led or herded along behind the wagons to be used only when needed to fill the ranks when oxen died or had to be slaughtered for food.



John Jacob Ressler

While oxen were the primary draft animals of the Iowa City expedition, there were a number of horses included in the train. Horses gave added mobility to their owners and served better for scouting and hunting purposes. Abraham Owen's account mentioned two saddle horses along with the cows and oxen as the property of four partners, Owen, Ressler, Hess, and Snider. The men on horseback served as scouts, locating grass and water and likely places for camping, spotting the best trail when a choice occurred, and keeping a lookout for the possibility of Indian ambush.

There were few "lone wolves" when it came to outfitting for the trip across the plains in 1849. The estimate that \$300

was necessary to put an Argonaut "in business" assumed that he would form a partnership with others to share the cost of a wagon, draft animals, and provisions. The number of partners in a joint ownership arrangement could normally be from two to four, or the number that traveled with one wagon. Joint action, but not ownership, was extended to the next larger unit, the mess. Members of a mess had regularly assigned chores for making and breaking camp, and messmates had their meals together. Thus when Ressler spoke of "Joe Clement, our cook," he no doubt meant that Clement cooked for his mess and not for the whole train.

Stover mentioned that his partner was John Craig, and, "We had two yoke of oxen." The two also owned a pony which Craig lost during a buffalo hunt. Loring Wheeler had two partners, his brother-in-law, Alvin C. Harrison, and a Mr. Loomis. Aylett R. Cotton and Daniel Chessman Oakes of DeWitt were partners. Together they owned three yoke of oxen and various other items. They not only journeyed together on the way to California; they returned home to Iowa together as well. Chauncey Swan, Moore, and Sam McFadden were partners early in the journey, jointly owning a wagon and some oxen. Later on they split up in disagreement and with bitter feeling.

Abraham Owen listed four partners, himself, Ressler, Hess, and Snider. The references to Ressler occur so frequently that it appears there was a close friendship between the two. Ressler's account agrees in part with Owen's. However, he indicated a partnership of three to start the trip, himself, Charlie Pratt, and Fredrican (or Fredrickson).

Partnership arrangements among Forty-niners were born of necessity. Whereas many like the Swan, Moore, McFadden combination broke up because of contention, others were David and Jonathan affairs which not only lasted the journey but throughout life itself. J. J. Ressler remarked in later life to his son, Henry Ressler, "Abe Owen and Henry Walker are two of the best friends I ever had." In fact there was an unintentional carry-over of the relationship to succeeding generations occurring in the town of Williamsburg, Iowa, one hundred fourteen years later. Ressler's grandson and Owen's granddaughter attended the same church. Henry Walker's great, great grandson and Ressler's great, great grandsons played cowboys and Indians together, while the older brothers of these same boys belonged to the same Boy Scout troop and camped out together, all unmindful of the fact that their adventurous ancestors played the games for real.

The Iowa City Forty-niners were faced with a choice of two routes from Iowa City to Kaneshville (Council Bluffs), the jumping off place for the trip across the plains. The northern route passed through Fort Des Moines on a line of march roughly corresponding to present Highway 6. The alternate route headed southwest, crossing the Des Moines River at Eddyville. Further west it joined the old Mormon Trail of 1846. Finally, at modern-day Lewis, Iowa, the northern and southern trails met.

Had there been as many recruits for the expedition from southern Iowa as had been hoped for and predicted, the Eddyville road might well have been chosen. The editor of the *Iowa Sentinel* at Fair-



Loring Wheeler

field had predicted in the February 2, 1849 issue that the Iowa City train would pass through Fairfield. He also recommended that the gold-seekers in that area join it. However, the Jefferson County gold-seekers in the Fairfield area left earlier, joining up with another band at Traders Point in the Council Bluffs area. Their departure left no reason for the Iowa City people to go this lengthier southern route. The choice was then made. The Iowa City Forty-niners and their recruits from Eastern Iowa traveled the route through Fort Des Moines.

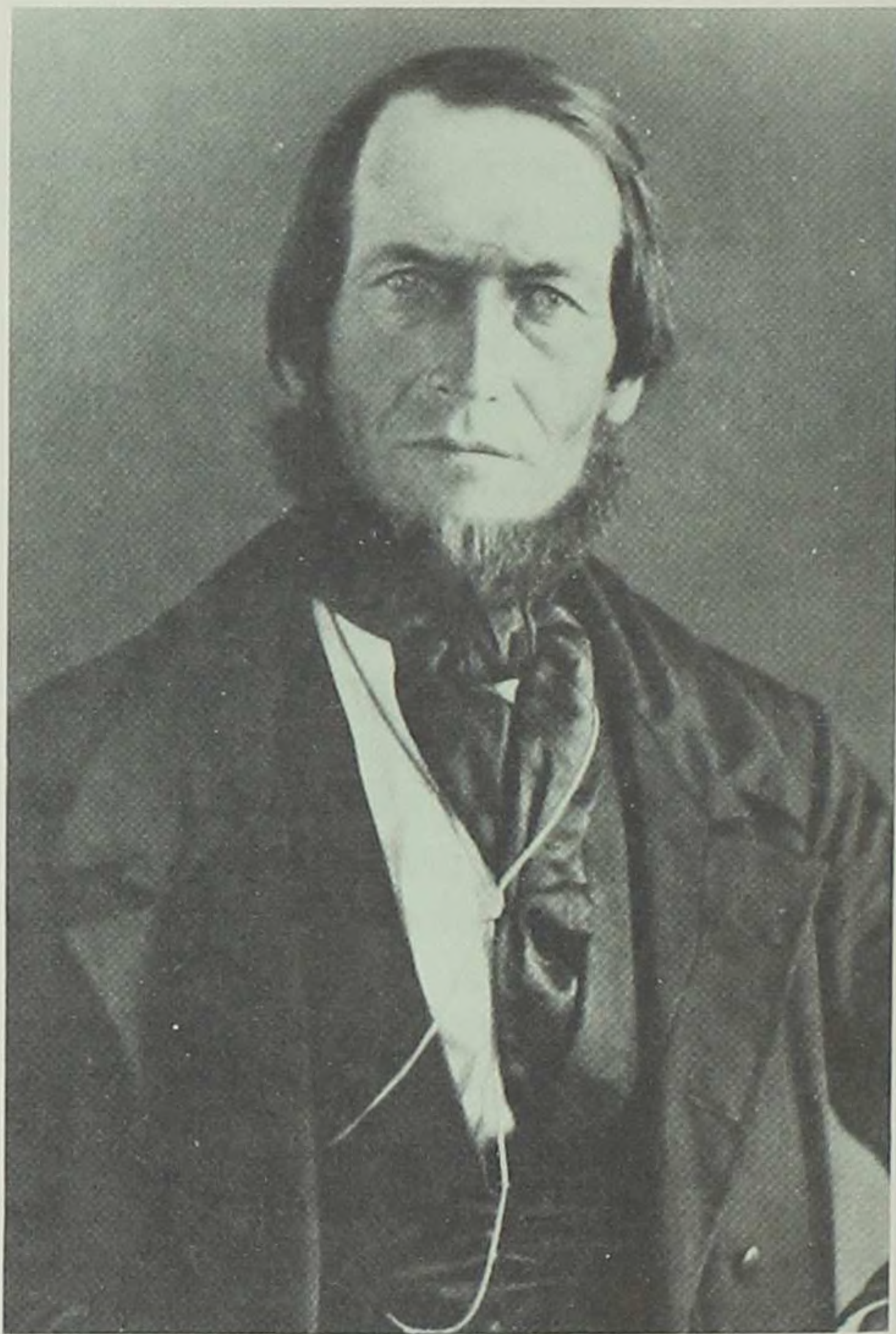
The date set for the start from Iowa City was April 1. Actually the starting date (or dates) came four or five weeks later. We have two dates from which to choose. John Jacob Ressler said April 30; Jacob Y. Stover said May 6. Since both men wrote or dictated their accounts nearly a half century later, the discrep-

ancy in dates is understandable.

Two bits of circumstantial evidence tend to support Stover's May 6 date. First, it is reasonably certain from contemporary 1849 references that the company was re-organized at Traders Point on the Missouri River about June 1. Figuring ox team travel at fifteen miles per day, a May 6 start would have allowed ample time for covering the 266 miles of distance between that point and the starting place at Iowa City. Also favoring the later starting date is the fact that the contingent from DeWitt in Clinton County left home on April 29, hardly in time for reaching Iowa City the next day.

There is also a distinct possibility that both Ressler and Stover were correct on their own starting dates, since part of the expedition may have become impatient and started earlier, traveling more leisurely to allow the late-comers to overtake them later. Evidence of two starting dates is explained by another discrepancy. Ressler placed the first night's encampment at Ike Dennis' place near Coralville, which is about three miles from Iowa City. Stover said ten miles was covered the first day, the stopping point being on Clear Creek. Ressler stated that on the third night out camp was made at Bear Creek, about thirty miles from the first camping place, so the indication is that normal progress of fifteen miles per day was made. Stover said that after the first day his train traveled an average of twenty-five miles per day. This seems a little fast for oxen, unless longer than usual hours were traveled to make up for lost time. If Stover did start later than Ressler, he caught up to him; for they both recorded the same incidents later.

The question of timing the start of the



Chauncey Swan

journey was very important and a mistimed departure could have dire consequences on the trail. A late start would mean less grass for the draft animals due to over-grazing by animals of those that had gone on ahead. Streams and springs in desert country would be dried up as summer progressed. Then there was the possibility of the travelers being stranded in the mountain passes from early snows, a fate which overtook the much publicized Donner party of 1846. Finally, late-comers to the gold fields could not expect pick and choice of the diggings. Why then should an expedition so thoroughly planned bog down on the matter of starting?

Contradictory as it may seem, the very

thoroughness of the plans laid down at Iowa City may have been the cause for delay. It was hoped that the Iowa City group would be the nucleus for an all-Iowa company. Despite invitations and urgings, neighboring communities were slow to respond. Loring Wheeler of DeWitt definitely stayed in line with the all-Iowa plan. However, the seventy-five miles of distance between DeWitt and Iowa City was certainly no unifying factor. From another account there is evidence that Clinton County had a late spring, no doubt helping to explain the late start from that area. Six days of travel, April 29 to May 5, was probably sufficient to get the Clinton County people to Iowa City where they could recruit themselves and their animals, meet their new traveling companions, and make a new start on June 6, which in 1849 came on a Sunday.

The question, "How did the Iowa City gold-seekers get to Des Moines in 1849?" could be answered, "They followed Highway 6." In terms of railroads the answer would be, "They followed the Rock Island." In 1849, they would have said to anyone inquiring (as did the Fort Des Moines *Iowa Star*), "Follow the wagon tracks. They'll take you to the Trading House, Marengo, Snook's Grove, Newton and Fort Des Moines."

Many of the details of the route are missing. The all-encompassing, "we went . . ." appears to be the standard description used by reminiscent Forty-niners to include travel over wide stretches of territory when all but the high spots of the journey had faded from their memories. In addition, no 1849 newspaper described the departure of any Iowa company. This negative aspect was well phrased by Fred

W. Lorch when he made his investigation based on newspaper writings:

"Not a single instance was discovered, for example, where an editor narrated the events of the stirring day when the local company departed, or depicted the dramatic moment when the long whips cracked and the ox teams and the covered wagons began the long march to the Pacific." (pp. 328-329).

Whatever the circumstance, the start of Ressler's party must have been a slow one, for the train made it only as far as Ike Dennis' place near Coralville, three miles distant, for the first night's camp. The next stop mentioned was at Bear Creek, where the travelers reported rain and that, "some of the boys stole a hog



Abraham Owen



A well-equipped gold-seeker setting off for the fields with arms, digging tools, and bed-roll. Mules sometimes substituted for horses as trail animals (painting by Albertis Browere, Knoedler Galleries, New York).

and butchered it." Here Ressler's plain statement of fact is verified by Abe Owen's elaboration of the incident:

Then they reached a piece of timber known as "Snooks Grove." Snooks had been living there quite a while, with no neighbors, and had accumulated quite a bunch of hogs. Some of the boys had been drinking, and were shooting recklessly at a target when one of them accidentally shot a hog. Abe, not wishing to see it go to waste, dressed it and divided it among the travelers. One of the bunch who received his share gladly was one preacher whom they all called Elder Briar. Owen then went to Snooks home to tell him that some of the boys had been drinking and had accidentally shot one of his hogs. That they would pay for the hog if he would name the price. Snooks, a very nice man said, "Oh, that is nothing. I don't want anything for the hog. I would only get \$1.50 per hundred for it anyway by hauling it clear to Iowa City—forty miles distance."

The next event worth remembering was the crossing of the Skunk River, the main branch of which met the trail probably in the vicinity of present-day Colfax. Until this time the streams to be crossed after ferrying the Iowa River at Iowa City were of such minor size that they were probably forded. This may not have always been easy, however, since at this season of the year spring rains often swelled even the smaller streams. Also, Iowa mud was no doubt a problem, adding to the difficulty of pulling the loaded wagons. At the Skunk River the need for ferrying presented itself, as Stover related:

"We had some trouble at Skunk River.

We cut dry cottonwood logs and made a raft, stretched ropes across the river, ran the wagons across and swam our oxen over."

Chauncey Swan had a good word for the next major crossing the "Rackoon forks" (junction of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers). He suggested in the letter to his wife that the site at Fort Des Moines might have been a better choice for the state capital than Iowa City. (His opinion became fact eight years later.) His reference has special significance in view of the fact that it was he who as one of three commissioners was most instrumental in the selection of Iowa City as the site for the first capital of the Territory of Iowa. This plus the fact that he helped plan the town and supervise the early construction of the Old Stone Capitol later earned him the title, "Father of Iowa City."

Of the Iowa City Argonauts who left memoirs, Jacob Y. Stover gave most mention of Fort Des Moines and the ferrying of the Des Moines River at its junction with the Raccoon.

"The next stream was at Fort Des Moines. When we got there we found a flat boat, crossed the Des Moines River. Landed right below the old fort. There were some log cabins with split timber some twelve feet high set in the ground around the houses—that was the size of Fort Des Moines."

Leaving Fort Des Moines, the company embarked on Clark's Road, a known pathway to Council Bluffs. The track was named for Dr. H. M. Clark of Andrew

who, with others, operated a ferry at St. Francis. The road struck west across the prairie. A member of the Hawk-eye company described the road as follows:

After crossing the North river at Brown's ford, the road runs on a fine divide between Middle river and Cedar Creek to Marvin's Grove,—water and timber plenty; thence to Tucker's Grove on Middle river, half a mile from the divide, without slough, timber in sight on each side of the road, to Allen's Grove, at the Badger, bottom or ridge to suit the traveler; to East Nodaway, ridge road; to West Nodaway, ridge; Campbell's Grove, stream bridged—this is a delightful spot—high land to Nishnabotony. In fact, all concur in saying that this is the best ground for a road in the state, and the only good road for all northern emigrants . . . it is fifty miles nearer than any other to the Missouri river, and much the best. Good teams can easily make the distance in six days, as most of us have done.

At the present town of Lewis, in Cass County, Iowa, Clark's Road joined with the Mormon Trail of 1846 and was identical to it, at least until the Traders Point-Kanesville Fork.

Two questions present themselves: (1) Did the Iowa City company take Clark's Road to Council Bluffs; and (2) Where is Clark's Road in terms of modern names of roads and towns? Reasoning from the sources, the tentative answers seem to be: (1) that the Iowa City ox train *did* travel Clark's Road, and (2) that the expedition traveled southwest from Fort Des Moines to present-day Winterset, then proceeded west, parallel to present Highway 92, through present-day Lewis and (probably) Oakland.

There is support for the assumption that the train followed Clark's Road in Ressler's comment, "We took the old Mormon Trail to Council Bluffs." In addition, he mentioned that Stover killed an elk near the headwaters of the Grand River. This would place the party near Clark's Road, since Grand River (some times shown as "Thompson River") rises near Greenfield. The notion that it was Clark's route is reinforced by Aylett R. Cotton's remark that "Mr. Clark who controlled the territory" gave Col. Wheeler's train an early preference in crossing on his ferry, thus indicating a prior understanding or acquaintance. Cotton also mentioned that the road followed was marked with elk horns enscribed "C.B." for Council Bluffs. This fits with Clark's tendency to advertise his ferry. The clinching argument is that none of the travelers mentioned any places along possible alternate routes. If they had gone on the route through Pisgah, as did Lyman Mitchell who preceeded them, they would have discussed identifiable places.

It is certain that many in the train were not impressed with the countryside. As Chauncey Swan put it, "from Desmoines to council bluff is a barran waste and can never be improved."

Determining the modern counterpart of Clark's Road is probably more difficult than following the original trail in 1849, for the Iowa City company had the benefit of guides and maps. Besides, they had the tracks of those who had gone before and the marked elk horns to assure them they were headed aright.

After the ferrying of the Des Moines River below the junction with Raccoon, the Iowa City party followed the latter in a westerly direction upstream on the south side. This fact is verified by an *Iowa Star* reporter who stated: "We accompanied the Iowa City boys a few miles 'up'Coon' and left them in a merry mood, satisfied with the route they had taken, and confident of being among the first at their journey's end."

Just how far "up'Coon" the Forty-niners traveled and how they got south to modern Highway 92 is questionable. A map study of Polk and Madison counties reveals that the distances expressed in the two paragraphs of verbal description are compatible with those revealed on modern maps. Following "up'Coon" on the south side for eight miles would have brought the travelers to the vicinity of the convergence of Polk, Warren, Madison, and Dallas counties. By leaving the Raccoon here and traveling in a southwesterly direction into Madison County for four miles they would have hit Badger Creek. Continuing south and perhaps a little west, they would have hit North River. The seven miles to Happy Grove would have put them somewhere in the neighborhood of present-day Patterson, perhaps a couple of miles west. The next six miles to Marvin's Grove would appear to bring our travelers to present-day Winterset, a total distance of thirty-one miles.

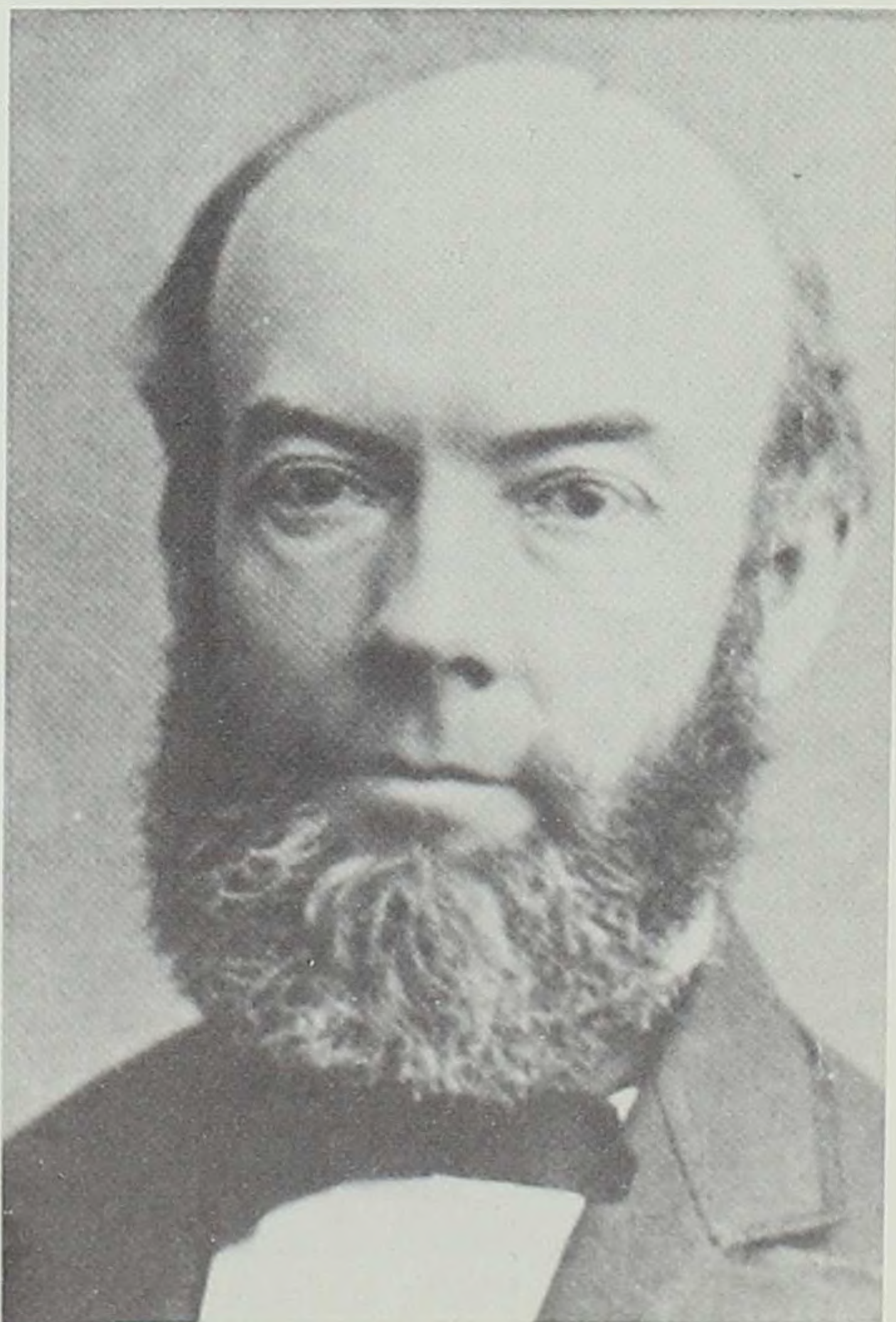
The "barran waste" between Fort Des Moines and Council Bluffs was but for one incident devoid of any happenings worth fifty years' remembrance by the

reminiscing Forty-niners. Ressler elaborated on the story in his account dictated to his daughter:

"In a grove near the headwaters of the Grand River an elk was killed by Jake Stover and Doc. Downer. I dragged it in with a yoke of oxen, and we divided the meat."

Jacob Y. Stover, who even in his old age had a sense for the dramatic, stated it this way:

We had some fun going up a hollow. In a small pack of old grass, up jumps an elk four or five rods to our right. I stopped



Aylett Cotton

my team and hallooed "Carlo." As usual he was on hand and away they went. Dr. Downer and I had a pony and he, as it happened, was close by. He put after them while all the rest of us hallooed our best. I was satisfied the last I saw of the elk and dog that he would get him, so I ran as tight as I could to the tope of the bluff. I saw Carlo had the elk down. Dr. Downer was cutting its throat. We dressed it and we had beef for supper for the whole train.

Whether Carlo brought down the elk single-handed or whether Jake Stover had previously wounded him with a gun shot, as might be inferred from Ressler's description, is impossible to say, but Stover's "brag dog," Carlo, was a real hero, as both his wolf hunting and elk hunting exploits attest. His loss during the ferrying of "Big Muddy" was no doubt regretted by the whole company.

When the Iowa company reached the Missouri River, they were in the vicinity of Kaneshville, or modern day Council Bluffs. However, there is considerable confusion over this area since many place names of 1849 refer to different spots than the name is now associated with. The original Council Bluffs was drawn by some cartographers in the 1840s where present-day Omaha stands. The name also may have referred to a council place dating from the 1804 Lewis and Clark expedition. To complicate matters in 1849 several places were known as "Council Bluffs." The Indian agency south of present day Bellevue received and sent mail with the Council Bluffs address. The sub-agency across the river (Traders Point or

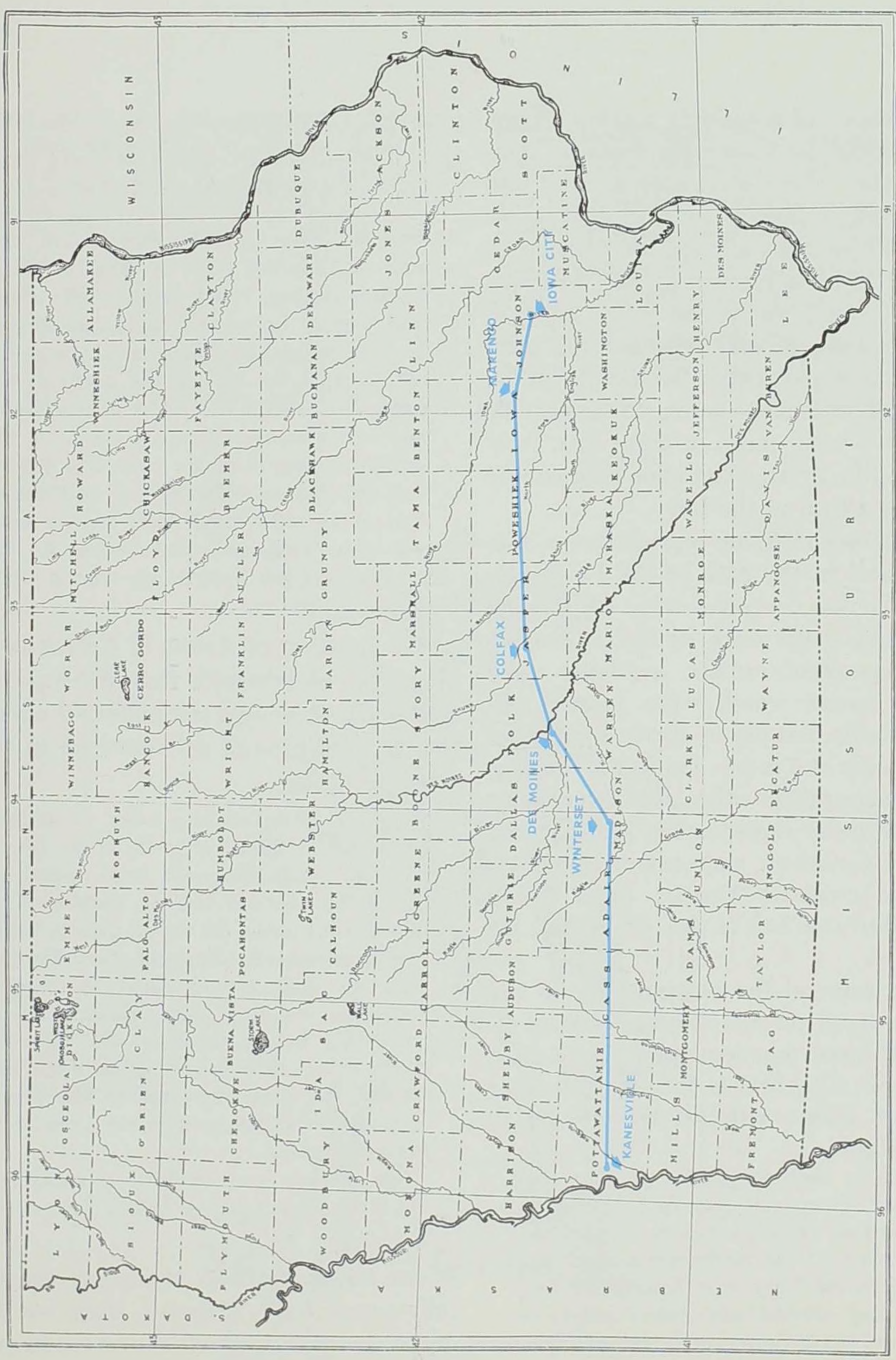
St. Francis) also was called by some Council Bluffs. Indeed the entire region from the Platte to Ft. Atkinson was sometimes referred to by the general term.

In 1849, "Omaha" referred only to the Indian tribe which inhabited the area. The site of modern Bellevue was known as the Presbyterian Mission which served the Omahas, and earlier the Pawnees. As mentioned, Traders Point and St. Francis were the same place on the Iowa side of the Missouri. Also in the vicinity was Winter Quarters, a stopping point on the Mormon Trail where the followers of Brigham Young spent the winter of 1846-47.

Present day Council Bluffs was first known as Miller's Hollow (the "Holler") which was the site of the homes of several Mormons who had decided to forego the rigors of the trail west. Miller's Hollow eventually came to be known as Kaneshville until the name was officially changed to Council Bluffs in 1853.

Whether the Iowa City Argonauts and their companions from Clinton and other counties followed the right fork of the road to Kaneshville or the left fork to Traders Point and later made a tour to Kaneshville we do not know. But that they went to Kaneshville by one manner or another would appear to be a certainty. In the first place, they no doubt had time on their hands while waiting their turn at the ferry. Kaneshville was the outfitting place where you bought the things you forgot to bring from home but needed for the journey across the plains. As in all frontier towns, and in spite of all the Mor-

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mon elders' admonishing against them, there existed in Kanesville certain "dens of iniquity" where men with a thirst and a gambling instinct could find expression. And who would pass up the chance to at least steal a glance at the Mormon maidens, some of whom were sure to be seen on the streets? Whether you went as an active participant or simply as an interested onlooker, going to Kanesville must have been more inviting to a foot-loose and fancy free bachelor than simply awaiting a turn at the ferry.

The Missouri River represented a major obstacle in the path of the Forty-niners. It was too deep and wide for fording or for make-shift rafts, so the Argonauts were dependent on the available commercial ferries which were located not at Kanesville, but either about eight miles downstream at Traders Point (St. Francis) or upstream twelve miles at Winter Quarters. The party representing Johnson and Clinton Counties and points between chose to cross at Traders Point, using the facilities of Dr. H. M. Clark and his associates.

While some of the primary sources say nothing at all of the ferrying process itself, we have two accounts that tell it quite well. The first is that of Catherine Margaret Haun, wife of the Henry P. Horn (Haun):

On May 26th we started to cross the Missouri River and our first real work affronted us. The wheels of the wagons had to be taken off and the bodies carried onto the flat-boats. They were then piled with goods and covered with heavy canvas or rubber sheets to protect the provisions from

water. Sometimes two or three small wagons were taken at the same time.

The flat-boats were attached by a pulley to a rope stretched across the river to prevent its being carried down stream, and even so, row as best the men could, it landed very far down the opposite shore and had to be towed up stream to the landing before the load could be taken off. Ropes were tied to the horns of the oxen and around the necks of the mules and horses to assist them in stemming the current as they swam the river. The women and children sat tailor fashion on the bottom of the raft. Much time and strength was thus consumed and owing to the great size of our caravan we were a week in getting across . . .

The account of Aylett R. Cotton corresponds so closely with that of Mrs. Haun that one cannot help but believe that there was some degree of collaboration in their writing:

. . . it occupied one week in getting across the wagons, etc., of 48 ox teams and one wagon of a mule team owned by Loring Wheeler and Alvin G. Harrison. The wheels were taken off the wagons in loading the same on the flat boat. The Missouri was very high, the flat boat was rowed across, but would go quite a distance down the River before reaching the Western shore, it was then towed up on the West side of the River by oxen to the place of landing and returned to the Iowa side for another load.

The animals were made to swim across the River, ropes being fastened to each of them.

When the Iowa City Argonauts successfully crossed the Missouri, they left the relatively safe confines of Iowa and pre-

pared to move out onto the plains. The crossing marked their departure from the organized United States. The Great Plains and the California coast were not part of the country in any normal sense of the phrase. Not until their return home to Iowa would they be in the safe world of politics, taxes, and post offices. The future would hold many surprises for the

brave band, including hardship, death, and for some the pot of gold in California. The trails divided many times as the party moved further west, until there was almost nothing left of the original idea of a company. Whatever their fortunes, the trip across Iowa had been their first step in the great adventure of 'forty-nine. □



The "typical" Argonaut, armed to the teeth and ready to make his fortune.