

An Early Iowa Wagon Train

[Iowa may not have had its "Chisholm Trail" nor its "Twenty Mule Team" but it did have pioneer wagon trains supplying the more remote regions of the frontier. In the spring of 1872, A. K. Webb traveled from Nevada through Story City, Webster City, Fort Dodge, and on to Sioux County with his wagon train. The difficulties of traveling in late March and early April can be readily appreciated, particularly since only mud roads were available and these became veritable quagmires at this season of the year. The town of O'Brien that is mentioned in this letter was located in Waterman Township in O'Brien County, a scant three miles west of Peterson. A post office was established at O'Brien on February 26, 1862, with James W. Basler as first postmaster. It was discontinued in 1882. The Webb letter appeared in the Story County (Nevada) *Representative*, May 16, 1872. THE EDITOR.]

From Sioux County, Iowa. March 6th, 1872.

EDITOR REPRESENTATIVE. — A few reminiscences of the Northwest may be of interest to the readers of your most excellent paper. We left your town March 29th, and the first evening found our company near the City of Stories [Story City]. The morning of the 30th was dreary and by noon we were compelled to turn in for quarters on the outlet of Mud Lake. With snow and rain driving, convinced that our quarters were untenable, we

hitched up our train and made our way from the outlet of Mud Lake to a Mr. John Fosters, where we found comfortable quarters for our selves and 17 horses. On the 31st Sabbath, we found a snow from 3 to 4 inches deep, and very cold. We lay over until Monday April 1st. Nothing out of the usual order occurred until we neared Webster City, when we had a slough down. We found Webster notwithstanding her muddy streets, full of business. The evening of the first, found us some three miles from the City, west, where we were puzzled to find enough dry ground to camp on. April 2d, found us wending our way toward Ft. Dodge, passing through a section of country wonderfully adapted to the raising of aquatic animals. Finally we arrived at the much heard of but never seen Ft. Dodge, and we must confess that our expectations were not met. It was with the greatest difficulty that our train made its way through her streets without sticking, and a mule in our train was so impressed with the idea of going under, that when it stopped to rest it climbed upon the sidewalks. After replenishing, somewhat, our provision box with dried beef and the best cheese we ever had the fortune to buy, we at last took our course westward and continued to march until we came to the turbid waters of Big Lizzard, where we camped for the night and fed corn fodder for hay. The 3d found us winding our way up the east side of the Lizzard until we could make a

crossing. The evening found us near the borders of Pocahontas county. On the 4th, we began the crossing of the 26 mile prairie without a house.



A Pioneer Cabin — Always Room For One More

But to make the 26 mile prairie interesting, we had the exquisite pleasure of seeing an Elk and having a chase, but without success. Pocahontas is noto-

rious for ponds and small Lakes. The evening of the 5th brought us to the residence of Mr. B. the Richest man in O'Brien County, whose farm lies on the banks of the Little Sioux. He has near a hundred head of horned cattle, horses by the score, and greenbacks by the thousands in the bank so we were informed. Here is a chance for some old maid to make her fortune. Mr. B — having never been married though living for the last 16 years in his little old cabin on the banks of the Sioux. April 6th, 12 o'clock M., brought us up standing at the town of O'Brien, startled with the information that we could not cross the Little Sioux, the ferry boat not being in repair. After a consultation with some of the county officials and those who had the authority to put in running order the old ferry boat, we agreed to put in our time in helping to repair the boat if they would lead out. So they agreed, and we hauled up at the O'Brien House and remained there until the afternoon of the 9th, when we effected a crossing. The boat was hauled out into the current of the river on Sabbath, and turned upside down by the aid of the river, then hauled in corked and pitched, and then thrown back in the river. Mr. Whipple was our boss in repairing the boat. We give him the appellation of Commodore Whipple, and named the boat the "Geny Whipple" which the traveling community will always find ready, with the smiling Commodore to cross them over. The prevalent

sin of O'Brien, is profanity. We arrived in Sioux county T. 97, R. 44, April 11th. People were sowing wheat when we arrived. Wheat is now up and looking well. A great deal of wheat sown in the northwest. Our weather is now very fine. We have had several days very high winds. Our prairies now are beautiful to behold. The Northwest against the world for fine prairies. Planting corn will begin briskly this week. Ground in fine order for corn. The coldest day last winter, the thermometer stood at 22 degrees below 0. The people of our section of the country have experienced their hardest winter, as they will be better prepared for the future. Cattle have been living on the prairie since the 1st. Some Homesteads yet to be had. This cannot be said long of our part of the country. "The star of Empire" takes its westward course.

A. K. WEBB