Overland from St. Louis to the California Gold Field in 1849: The Diary of Joseph Waring Berrien*

Edited by Ted and Caryl Hinckley**

On January 24, 1848, an inconsequential California laborer noted in his diary: "This day some kind of mettle was found in the tail race that looks like goald, first discovered by James Martial, the Boss of the Mill." Earlier the colorful John A. Sutter had ordered James Marshall to build a sawmill in the Coloma Valley on the South Fork of the American River. In the process of deepening the millrace, Marshall's men had indeed discovered "goald." According to historian John Caughey, this soft, yellow metal was to have a greater influence on California history than any other single factor.²

Because this newly discovered gold was sheltered within the isolated Sierra Nevada Mountains, it was several months before the solitude of the lovely Coloma Valley was shattered by hordes of gold-seekers. Thereafter methodical prospecting slowly but steadily supplanted the first feverish treasure hunting; ultimately the full extent of the mother lode lay revealed. This fabulously rich strip of the Sierra

* Thousands of persons from the Old Northwest became Forty-niners, many of them traveling the same route westward which Berrien followed. Doubtless most of them had experiences similar to those Berrien describes. It is hoped that the printing of this diary will bring to light accounts by Hoosier Argonauts which merit publication. Persons who have such accounts are invited to write Donald F. Carmony, Editor, Indiana Magazine of History, History Department, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, regarding their possible publication.

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2 John Walton Caughey, California (New York, 1940), 304.
Nevadas, roughly 150 miles in length, plus the far-flung gold fields which lay adjacent to it encompassed an area approximately 700 miles long by 50 miles wide.3

"Forty-niner" has become the collective label for those who participated in the famous California gold rush. Quite a few people arrived in 1848, and many came after 1849; however, it was the year 1849 which witnessed the first large wave of gold-seekers.4 Joseph Waring Berrien, author of this account and resident of Belleville, Illinois, was such a Forty-niner. He was one of about 80,000 persons who reached California during 1849, some 55,000 of whom journeyed overland.5 Like most of those going west, Berrien traveled via an overland trail. Very likely he chose this route rather than the quicker and cleaner passage by sea because a land journey was cheaper. Then too, he may have considered the fact that Belleville was much closer to California by land than by sea.

Dreams of quick wealth and high adventure led many a young American to exchange the security of civilization for the dangers of western travel and the vagaries of gold mining. Usually the highly speculative nature of gold mining was revealed only by hindsight. Though hazards incurred in reaching the fields were great, they have been unduly emphasized. As Berrien's account makes clear, two factors substantially lessened perils confronting overland Forty-niners. First these travelers were not moving west in isolated bands but in an irregular stream, and wagon companies were often within sight of one another. When Berrien's wagon broke down, he simply hiked off to secure the needed part. Heavy traffic usually guaranteed that assistance was not too distant and that in a pinch needed supplies could be obtained. A second major condition which eased the crossing was the apathy of the red men. The California Trail led through a region inhabited by such famous nomadic hunting tribes as the Pawnee, Sioux, and Cheyenne. As Walter Prescott Webb has noted, it was the horse and buffalo which had enabled these Plains Indians to maintain their integrity

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3 Paul, *California Gold*, 38-44.
against the white men. Fortunately for Joseph Berrien and his fellow Forty-niners, these Indians did not understand how soon the buffalo was to be eliminated. Red men would frighten and bully the Argonauts, but it was not until some years later, when goaded by fear of extinction and enforced removals, that they became a real threat to life.

Prior to the Mexican War, 1846-1848, most overland emigrants to the Pacific coast pointed their prairie schooners toward the Columbia and Willamette valleys of the Oregon Country. The famous Oregon Trail which they established was, of all the crude roads west, the trail which built up America's western empire. Before the coming of man it had been the track of wild animals on their seasonal migrations for grasses. Later it became a route used by Indians, then a pathway for the ubiquitous trapper. In 1843, five years before the discovery of gold in California, over one thousand persons moved westward over the Oregon Trail. A small number of these emigrants left the Oregon Trail in southwestern Wyoming or southeastern Idaho and made their way to California; it was not until the time of the gold rush, however, that significant numbers moved into California.

Council Bluffs, Iowa, St. Joseph, Missouri, and other places served as starting points for the Oregon Trail, but Independence, Missouri, was perhaps the favorite rendezvous. The Forty-niners thronged into these towns as they rushed westward. Many who commenced their wagon trains from near Independence had ascended the Missouri by steamer from St. Louis as Joseph Berrien did. As travelers headed west from Independence, the Oregon Trail and the Santa Fe Trail were one for a short distance. At the fork of these trails, the Forty-niners proceeded on the Oregon Trail across northeastern Kansas and reached the Platte River in south-central Nebraska. From here they followed the Platte and then the North Platte out of Nebraska into Wyoming where they crossed the Rockies at South Pass and moved thence to Fort Hall in southeastern Idaho. Most Forty-niners remained on the Oregon Trail to Fort Hall, and from there they followed

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7 J. R. Gregg, History of the Oregon Trail, Santa Fe Trail, and Other Trails (Portland, Ore., 1955), 151.
8 George R. Stewart expertly summarizes the opening of the first wagon road to California in 1844 in Moses Schallenberger, The Opening of the California Trail, ed. George R. Stewart (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 1953).
the California Trail across northern Nevada, through the very difficult passes of the Sierra Nevadas, and into the Promised Land. The heavy traffic of Forty-niners and other overlanders so pulverized and dug into the soil and vegetation that in places tourists can yet see ruts made by the emigrant trains.

Judging by his diary, Berrien was entirely conventional in the manner in which he joined a California-bound wagon train. Other than his precious mules, he seldom mentions items in his inventory of equipment and supplies. Most likely he began his journey with meal, perhaps with butter and eggs laid down in it, several barrels of flour, bacon or salt pork, coffee, salt, and saleratus. He was also probably equipped with such vital items as a frying pan, matches, firearms, bucket, axe, blankets, extra clothing, and a supply of rope. After some verbal assurances from Belleville friends that he would be welcome to join Colonel Jarrot's Company, he purchased his equipment and the indispensable mules at St. Louis, boarded a Missouri River steamer, and proceeded to St. Joseph, a major embarkation town for the Forty-niners. From here he set out on a journey which was to last four months.

Unfortunately the editors, in whose possession the diary resides, have learned but little about Joseph Waring Berrien. As is so often the case when a manuscript has been passed from generation to generation, only the most fragmentary information accompanies it. According to the recollections of now deceased relatives, particularly those of T. C. Hinckley, Sr., Berrien was a young, unmarried New Yorker who had come to Belleville, Illinois, not too long before the gold rush fever spread across the United States. The Berrien journal is among the finest of the many Forty-niner accounts which the editors have examined. Berrien's lucid descriptions easily enable the reader to participate in what was probably the most exciting experience of the diarist's life. Berrien's occasional reflections on those with whom he traveled show him to have been quite human. Obviously he was proud to be an

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9 John Walton Caughey, *Gold is the Cornerstone (Chronicles of California)*; Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 1948), 98.
10 For another account by a member of the Colonel Jarrot Company of overlanders, see the Daniel W. Gelwick Journal which is on file at the Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield, Illinois. It is, however, distinctly inferior to the Berrien Diary.
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American, and although he knew he was participating in a great undertaking, Berrien's sense of the romantic rarely overwhelms his reportorial integrity. Certainly the excellence of his composition will arouse envy among contemporary readers.

Regrettably there is no written record of Berrien's success or failure in the diggings. A third-generation descendant once surmised that Berrien "lost his shirt and came back to Belleville a man poorer of purse but wealthier in common sense." Whatever may have been the case, his journal remains as another testament to the astonishing attraction of the West and most particularly to this force as a major factor in shaping American history.

Left St Louis 31st March [1849] at 9 1/4 PM enroute for California on the steamer Alice, Kennett Master bound for St Joseph Mo the starting point selected by the Company in whose party I wish to journey. Passd St Charles in the night, Herman next afternoon at 3 O clock, Mouth of the Osage river at 8 o clock same Evening, Jefferson City during the night of the 1st April. Arrived at Boonville 8 O'clock April 2nd, Glasgow same day at 1 O'clock, Brunswick at 1/2 past 6 same Evening—have passd several Boats that started

1 The editors have made every effort to copy the Joseph Waring Berrien Diary exactly as it was written. Misspellings and peculiarities of punctuation are recorded as the diarist entered them, except that dashes become periods or commas where appropriate. In instances where the editors are uncertain whether a given mark was intended to be a comma or a period, the mark is interpreted according to modern usage. The same interpretation has been applied to doubtful capital letters. It is sometimes impossible to tell whether Berrien meant such words as "everything" and "overtake" to be written as one or two words; therefore, these and similar doubtful words are made to conform with present-day spelling. Berrien did not use paragraphing in writing his diary, presumably to avoid wasting writing space. In printing the diary, paragraphs are used to mark the beginning of Berrien's comments for each day, but the diary has been left otherwise unparagraphed.

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2 St. Joseph and Independence, Missouri, were major embarkation towns. Other towns which suddenly found themselves playing hosts to impetuous gold-seekers were Brownsville, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, and Austin, Texas; Fort Smith and Van Buren, Arkansas; and Kanesville (Council Bluffs), Iowa. Ralph P. Bieber, "California Gold Mania," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXV (June, 1948), 25.
before us. viz the Mary, Highland Mary Kit Carson and Mustang. Met Steamers Haidu and Julia returning to St Louis. We have a very jovial set on our Boat nearly all of them for California amongst the rest several Musicians including 4 or 5 violinists, a French Horn player a flute and Clarionet. The 1st day of our journey was beautiful and Cloudless—untill Evening when the weather thickened up threatening rain There is one unfortunate circumstance connected with our Boat though one of the finest on the Missouri River and that is the absence of Lady passengers of whom we have not a solitary one to shed a preserving influence upon us and I am fearful on that account that some accident will occur before we reach the end of our journey. The weather continued cloudy during the whole of April 2nd and at sundown it commenced raining We have had very difficult and cautious navigation struck several sand Bars during our journey and at one time with so much force as to throw down some 10 or 15 mules—of which there is some 50 on board including 4 of mine. Reached Miami about 10 o'clock and landed freight by torchlight.

April 3d Morning rainy and cold—obliged to lay by during the previous night on account of the darkness although there is a fine moon—reached Carrolton landing ½ past 6 AM. Found there the steamer Saluda tied up to the Bank with a broken shaft. Beautiful prairie country, arrived at Waverly at 8½ O clock passd steamer Kansas turning out from the latter place. arrived at Dover Landing at ¾ past 10. Some 8 or 10 miles above the last place, on the opposite side of the river We landed and took on board one of the Bellevill California Waggons with J. Sargent and others in charge. This was a very pleasant meeting for me though the accident was unfortunate for them. They had broken their waggon so that they could not travel with it, and had sent their Mules forward in charge of some of their Company. The steamer Sacramento passd us at this place on her way to St Louis, arrived at Lexington at ½ past 12. Steamer Dahcotah in sight which left St Louis 48 hours before us. Pass'd her ¾ of a mile above Lexington discharging freight. Stoppd the afternoon of the third at Camden a small settlement above Lexington to land way freight. Our Musicians took advantage of our stay to give us a concert and such a scraping of violins,
braying of Horns, breathing of flutes, mixed up with the voices of some ½ dozen vocalists of most discordant tone, together with the braying of mules Barking of Dogs and the swearing of our Mate who is a most ferocious fellow, was perhaps never heard before. We have passd during the day immense flocks of Wild Geese feeding on the Sand Bars also flocks of ducks and Pelicans which have furnishd our marksmen with some employment. Talking of Geese reminds me that we have a large quantity of them on board and those of the greenest kind. There is a party of New Yorkers on board dressed in uniform of Blue Cassimere, armed with Government Rifles Bowie Knives and Colts Revolvers who are the most lackadasical Milk and Waterish fellows I ever saw. they are in fact to use the words of M. Morrison, as green as a pumpkin vine From their appearance one would suppose they had never seen more of the world than can be seen from behind the counter of a paltry Dry Goods or Thread and Needle Store and their ridiculous affectation of Military Style and Etiquette joined to their egregious vanity, Hoggishness of Manners and evident high estimation of themselves to the exclusion of all others exposes them to the ridicule of all and almost tempts me to deny my Country. It is my private opinion that before they arrive at their destination they will be perfectly well acquainted with the “Elephant.” This Evening about ½ past 6 we ran upon a Sand Bar and lay aground all night in a very bad position—a very Stormy night, rainy Cold and boisterous.

Morning of the 4th [April]. Still hard aground The steamer Dahcotah passed us the Evening before some 3 hours after we struck. 9. o'clock steamer St Ango passd us on her way to St Louis. Our Hay for the Mules has been nearly all stolen during yesterday and last night and should we remain here long they will have nothing to Eat. We are now about 30 miles from Independence and I hope may get off soon enough to procure a fresh supply at that place Had not my Hay been stolen I should have had sufficient and to spare after my arrival at St Joseph. Lost my Hat overboard this morning the wind blew it off my head some 50 yards into the river. The wind yet blows quite fresh but the clouds have dispersed and the sun begins to impart some warmth. The Trees in the River Bottoms begin to show some signs of vegetation and in
some places the grass looks quite green though should the weather continue as cold as at present it cannot grow much. Our position at present furnishes me with some Experience of the pleasures of Steamboat navigation on the Missouri River and I must confess they are neither very inviting nor agreeable. We lie across the current at the head of a Sand Bar the water 6 feet deep on one side and 3 inches on the other, the current rushing by us like a Mill Race and a strong wind blowing us farther on. We are nearly out of fuel so that our Engines are useless to us and our only hope rests in our stream anchor which our Mate with his crew are at present engaged in carrying out. The crew have worked hard all night Sparring and trying to work off but without success. and all this has happen’d to us because there are no Ladies on Board. This afternoon just as the crew arrived with a yawl load of wood we slid off the Bar and parted our Hawser attached to the anchor We drifted about a mile below before the other anchor was let go. in fact our slipping off the Bar took the officers of the Boat completely by surprise. The Captain and First Pilot did not Know we were off untill we were drifting down the River and the Engineer at the time had a part of his Engines to pieces. We had no fire in the furnaces and no preparations made for getting under weigh. In a few moments however, we raised steam and after getting our anchors proceeded to the first House on the Bank of the River where we landed and collected a quantity of fence rails for fuel. This was about ½ past 4, so that we were detained on the Bar about 22 hours. an hour after we arrived at Sibly a small town and landed freight— 10. o’clock same night landed at Liberty six miles below Independence and as we had to discharge freight there, the Engineer determined to clean out the Boilers. This detained us some 4 hours so that we did not reach Independence till ½ past 3. Found Jacob Rapelye and Co at that place and a great many Californians in the vicinity camping in places all over the surrounding country. Independence is 3 miles from the river, but the landing goes by the same name. Left the landing about 7. o’clock and arrived at Kansas landing at 9.* Here we got rid of our Blue Cassimere friends from New York and I for one must confess I never parted with the

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*Kansas Landing ultimately became Kansas City. At this time the vicinity was also referred to as Westport or Westport Landing.
society of any one with less regret. Their assumption of military dignity joined to their native puppyism made me feel ashamed that they were Countrymen of Mine and exposed them to the ridicule of all. ½ past 12 passd Parksville a snug little village on the right hand side of the river. Since leaving Kansas the left side of the River is Indian Territory and the Country on both sides looks wild and deserted but is cover'd with magnificent timber and must be very fertile. Immense flocks of Geese cover the Sand Bars and as the Boat passes rise in clouds and with discordant cries fly on before us to the next Bar above. Our passengers are continually firing at them with their rifles but as yet but one Bird has been hit and left with a broken wing, solitary and alone on the desert Sand Bar. About 3½ O clock we passd Fort Leavenworth which is a finely situated post and in accordance with everything belonging to Uncle Sam appears to be kept in fine order. It is on the left bank of the River and the landing is the finest natural wharf I ever saw being formed of Limestone, with deep water at the Base of the rock and faced perfectly square and perpendicular. The Buildings are numerous and spacious and in summer it must be a beautiful spot. Passd the steamer Dahecotah lying at the wharf. The steamer Sacramento passd us in the morning on her way to St Louis. She had encountered a snag on her way up and torn off a portion of her guards. Six miles above the Fort we landed at a beautiful little town call'd Weston, a really charming place and landed a small portion of freight. Found here the steamer Timour which left St Louis nearly a fortnight before us and has but just got here and discharged her freight. There are a number of very pretty houses in this place and apparently considerable business is transacted. There are several very extensive commission and forwarding Houses, together with stores and mechanics shops of all kinds and the street, the principal one is paved. Little Houses substantially built sit perched about among the Cliffs and present a beautiful appearance from the river. Laid up for the night about 15 miles above Weston the land at which we tied up belonging to the Kickapoo nation.

* Fort Leavenworth had been established by Colonel Henry Leavenworth in 1827. Periodically thereafter it assisted in the maintenance of the Santa Fe Trail. In 1849 Fort Leavenworth was shifting from its Mexican War duties to status as a military police station on the restless Kansas frontier.
Friday Apl 6th. This Morning as I lay in my berth I was awakend by the cry of some person to "put out the fires quick". As I heard no sound of steam I was convinced there could be no danger from that cause and I laid still for some ½ hour longer. Upon getting up I found there had been a hole burnt through one of the Boilers—the result of negligence on the part of the Engineer, and which will detain us here 2 or 3 days unless some Boat should pass by on which we may procure passage. This is most unfortunate as the provender for my Mules is just gone and there is none to be procured near us unless we feed them on Cottonwood Bark of which there is plenty and which it is said they will eat rather than starve. Took a walk over the Cliffs after Breakfast, and discover'd the wigwam of an Indian pleasantly situated in a little valley at which we stoppd and procured about 1½ Bushels Corn, shelled which Cost us $1.00. The sides of the wigwam were formed of Matting made of rushes and the roof was covered with large peices of Bark piled over each other there were 2. or 3 squaws and a number of children there and they all appeard quite shy and somewhat displeased at our intrusion on their domain. The word "Dollar" however which they all understood soon set matters right and the old Indian shouldered the sack of corn which we bought and accompanied us to the Boat. Finding our provender diserting us we had made efforts to procure some at all the landings, but neither Hay Corn or Oats Could we find except at 1 place where an old Man gave us a Bucketfull of Ears, and at Kansas where "Mercure" procured ½ Bushel of Ears for which he paid the very reasonable price of 2.00 per Bushel. Took a walk this afternoon to the summit of a Bluff near the river from which we had a very extensive view of the surrounding country. Here from the pinnacle of the Bluff at the base of which rushes the mighty Missouri winding its tortuous course through the dreary wilderness, we look to the west and as far as the Eye can reach over a succession of hills and valleys forest and Mountains, and we cannot help feeling impressd with the wild and melancholy beauty of the scene. We are at this point over 800 miles from the mouth of the river and some idea of its magnitude may be

*"Mercure," Berrien’s partner, is mentioned only briefly in the diary. As is implied later, the diarist had apparently made an arrangement of convenience, not of confidence.
formed when we consider that it is navigable for 2500 miles farther for Boats of the size and class of the one we are on at present. While I was at the Bluffs sitting at the foot of a tree a little Indian Boy came to me with a Bow and Arrow in his hand. I first discovered him at the foot of the hill no doubt attracted there to view the steamer. As soon as he saw me he came directly to me and with a smile on his features greeted me in Indian fashion. I tried to converse with him but could only make myself understood by signs. In this manner I discovered he was a member of the family whose wigwam I visited in the morning. He wandered about near me for some time practising with his arrows up on the woodpeckers on the neighboring trees. At last he came and sat down near me motionless and silent. I had been writing in my memorandum Book and had fallen into a reverie, my mind was far away from the scene before me employed with the rememberances of other lands which though not possessing perhaps the same degree of Beauty and sublimity of scenery were still infinitely more endeared to me by early associations and cherished remembrances [sic], when the Indian boy touched me on the knee with his arrow and directed my attention to the river from the farthest distance of which I saw a steamer turning round a point and slowly stemming the turbid waters of the rushing Missouri. Shortly after the Bell of our Boat rang and I took my leave of the Indian Boy leaving him seated at the foot of a tree. The steamer in sight proved to be the Mary (we passd her the first night out from St Louis) and having no other resource we took passage on her, the Captain of our Boat shipping our freight and refunding our passage money in proportion to the distance travelled. We found this Boat too, very much crowded with Californians and of course being the last comers our accomodations were extremely poor. She is also a much slower Boat than the one we left not being able to make more than 4 miles an hour. We travelld along slowly untill 10 o'clock when we stoppd at a woodyard and tied up for the night.

Apl 7th Resumed our journey about 4 o'clock the next morning and after very tedious and slow progress reached St Joseph at ½ past 4 in the afternoon. This is a very pretty place and contains some very beautifull and substantial houses built of Brick and considering that 5 years ago there was not
a dozen houses here its progress is beyond all conception. Commenced unloading our waggons immediately on our arrival but as they were distributed all over the vessel we made very slow progress and I did not succeed in landing my waggon until after 12 at night. I stored my freight as soon as we landed and took my mules to a stable. I was obliged to stay on the wharf all night to guard my waggon my partner having deserted me early in the evening preferring his own comfort to a cheerless and uncomfortable watch on the shore. Next morning, obtained assistance from our Belleville friends, harnessed our mules and drove to their camp about a mile from the landing. Saw Col Jarrot this morning. He was engaged in crossing his waggons over the river to a camp about 4 miles out on the opposite side. Since they have been here Jarrots Co have passd a law prohibiting the admission of any more persons in their Company without the consent of a majority of the members, so that before I can be admitted the company must meet and a vote be taken. I do not anticipate much opposition to our admission still I will try to prepare for the worst.

St. Joseph had originally been founded by the trader-trapper, Joseph Robidoux. It began as a fur trading post in 1803, the year of the momentous Louisiana Purchase. Much later, after he had formally laid out plans for his city, Robidoux honored the site by naming it for his patron saint. Berrien arrived during the month when emigrant activity was at its peak. No sensible emigrant would plan on anything less than a four-month crossing, and to have departed from this advanced outfitting depot after the middle of May would have been courting disaster, for sometimes the deadly Sierra Nevada snowfall began in early September. Irene D. Paden, The Wake of the Prairie Schooner (New York, 1943), 54.

By 1849, St. Joseph could claim more than "fifteen hundred inhabitants, eighteen stores, two pork-packing establishments, two steam sawmills, two flour mills, two 'mechanic shops,' three churches, two newspapers, several saloons, a courthouse, and a triweekly stage. . ." Walker D. Wyman, "The Outfitting Posts," Rushing for Gold, ed. John Walton Caughey (Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, Special Publication, No. 1; Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 1949), 18.

"The pre-gold-rush caravans had been composed of farmers with an eye on the rich soil of Oregon. The Argonauts of '49, however, often included large numbers of mechanics and city-dwellers. The men would form themselves into a company not unlike a county militia company, elect a commander or "captain," and draw up rules providing for their common welfare. Sections from one such pact included:

"Whereas we are about to leave the frontier, and travel over Indian Territory, exposed to their treachery, and knowing their long and abiding hatred of the whites; also many other privations to meet with. We consider it necessary to form ourselves into a Company for
Apl 9th Spent the day in camp on the Banks of the Black Snake, a little stream that runs through the town. I busied myself in making Side Boards for my waggon and various other preparations for the trip. The Bellevillians with whom I am staying are very gentlemanly and kind and my first taste of camp life is very agreeable. Bacon fried and boiled Eggs Potatoes, Beans and Bean Soup Biscuit coffee and tea compose our fare and it is as good as any person can wish.

Apl 10 Still in camp made tent poles and pins this day and have but little more to do in the way of preparations During the night and the previous one it rained very hard but our double waggon cover resisted the wet weather admirably we sleep in our waggon and find it quite comfortable

Apl 11th Are busy in making preparations to cross the river to join the Company on the other side but will not cross today as the river has risen six feet within the last 2 days and is dangerous to cross on account of the drift The Ferry Boat is an old flat Boat which the passengers have to row across themselves and is an unweildy and unmanageable affair. Wrote a letter home this day and put it in the post office I was unable to write home before leaving St Louis as I had but one day to prepare and perfect all my arrangements and my time has been so completely occupied up to this time that I have been constrained to defer writing untill now. I regret this the more as I had promised to write and in this case had intended to perform. This afternoon went to St Joseph and bought some few articles necessary for my journey, for which as usual here I paid extravagant prices. The St Joseph people act upon the principle of charging ex-

the purpose of protecting each other and our property, during our journey to California.

Therefore Resolved, That there shall be one selected from the Company, suitable and capable to act as Captain or Leader.

Resolved, That we, as men, pledge ourselves to assist each other through all the misfortunes that may befall us on our long and dangerous journey.

Resolved, That the Christian Sabbath shall be observed, except when absolutely necessary to travel.

Resolved, That there shall be a sufficient guard appointed each night regularly, by the Captain.

Resolved, That in case of member's dying, the Company shall give him a decent burial." Quoted in Lorenzo Sawyer, Way Sketches: Containing Incidents of Travel Across the Plains From St. Joseph to California in 1850 . . . , ed. Edward Eberstadt (New York, 1926), 19n.
travagant rates for all the Emigrant requires being sensible they will not get another chance to take advantages of their necessities. No Emigrant having once experienced this as I have will ever again subject himself to their hospitality.8

April 12th Commed raining in the morning and continued to rain all day and nearly all night. busied myself in preparations for crossing the river. We purpose crossing at the upper Ferry about 4 miles above St Joseph. The river is quite narrow at that place and there are eddies on both sides so that it is quite easy to land, rained very hard during this night, and very uncomfortable in Camp.

13th Apl. Harness'd up our mules this morning and drove to the landing to get my provisions which were left in store at that place. one of my Mules is a wild stubborn little fellow who has never been broken and I have had some difficulty in putting him in harness but by the aid of a nose stick I have succeeded in cooling him down pretty well and I think he will prove to be as good a mule as I have. For the information of those who do not know what a nose stick is I will here state that it is nothing more than a short stick with a peice of rope spliced in one end. The loop of the rope is to be placed round the upper lip of the animal and by the aid of the stick twisted tight. By means of this simple instrument no matter how vicious or stubborn they may be [they] are easily conquered and made perfectly gentle. You can hold the most stubborn and fiery mule perfectly still with one hand and after the first struggle may handle every limb of their body rub them all over and crawl under their belly if you choose without their daring to lift a foot. I was perfectly astonished at the power of this instrument and wish that the knowledge of its power was generally known. After getting our provisions in the waggon I started for the upper ferry whither our Belleville friends had already gone but about a quarter of a mile out of town I stuck in a mud hole and had to procure a yoke of cattle to draw us out. I was driving but 2

8 Emigrant Berrien had only just begun to encounter the results of high demand and short supply. Word of the high prices which the merchants asked for “good American mules” may well have caused Berrien to assume the troublesome burden of hauling his own mules from St. Louis. Walker D. Wyman (ed.), California Emigrant Letters (New York, 1952), 34-35.
mules at the time as I wish'd to cool down my fiery little mule with a heavy load and get him well broke to his harness. The road was very bad however owing to the rain of the night previous so after getting out of our mud hole I put the 2 other mules before which made our team more than sufficient for any obstacles we were likely to encounter and we drove along in fine style soon overtaking our friends who had upwards of 3/4 of an hour the start of us. We arrived at the Ferry about 3 O'clock but as there were some teams before us we could not cross until next day so we camp'd on the bank of the river for the night. I fortunately had some 2 Bushels of corn with me so I gave my mules a good supper and after getting my own we wrap'd ourselves in our blankets and turned in for the night. A cold piercing frosty wind was blowing from the north and we slept very uncomfortably in our waggon.

Apl 14th on getting up in the morning we found ice in our Bucket 1/2 an inch thick which is rather a poor prospect for early grass. After getting our Breakfast we commenced crossing the [Missouri] river and succeeded in getting our wagons and teams over about 10 o clock after which we were obliged to cut our way through the woods about 2 1/2 miles to the camp of Col Jarrot at the foot of the Bluffs. We arrived at camp about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and after greeting the company assembled there we proceeded to unharness the mules and picket them out for the night. We are now in the Indian territory but we see very few of them
though the remains of some twenty wigwams and about the same number of graves scattered here and there along the banks of the little creek on which we are encamp'd show that they have lived here at some period during the last summer in some numbers. Our camp is pleasantly situated and there is very fair pasturage for our mules along the banks of the little creek which runs through it. The weather is so cold however that grass cannot grow on the plains and unless we carry grain it is useless to think of starting at present.

April 15 Sunday was a very pleasant day though the night previous was intensely cold, ice freezing in our Bucket nearly \(\frac{3}{4}\) of an inch thick. Pitched our tent last night for the first time and cooked our first meal, previous to this time we have been messing with our Belleville friends who have attended to the cooking department we furnishing our quota of provisions. There is some difficulty in regard to our joining the company of Col Jarrot and Mr Green of the Belleville Company informed me that the principal opposition proceeded from John Christy who it appears owes me some ill will from the fact of my not agreeing to admit him into my company when I first thought of going to California. For my decision however as regards himself he is alone to blame. I should have been glad to have had him with me had he not urged me to extravagant and unnecessary expense in my outfit, expense and responsibility which I could not incur and I am the more astonish'd at his opposition to me as I have never given him cause to be affronted or farther than I have related above laid a straw in his way. I should not be surprised however if his opposition at some day recoils upon his own head. I am glad always at having the opportunity of reading peoples Characters and in this case I think I have done so at very little cost to myself. The Company will probably leave here in the course of a few days previous to which there will be a general meeting for the Election of officers and if the question of my admission is then put to vote perhaps he may find I have as many friends as himself. The better portion of the company are beyond Christys influence, and Col Jarrot being an old acquaintance of mine I do not dispair of being able to carry my point. Should we not be admitted however, they cannot carry the road with them and I think from the
lightness of my waggon and the superiority of my mules, I shall easily be able to keep up with them or even to outstrip them should I think it proper or necessary to do so.

Apl 16th. Spent this day principally in camp writing letters and bringing up my journal to date. The weather was quite warm this day and the sun shone brightly but towards evening the sky became overcast and about 7 o'clock it commenced raining. The company talk of breaking up camp and starting for the Little Blue River Bottom the day after tomorrow, about 3 days journey. Remained Encamp'd at the same place until Thursday morning, nothing worthy of remark transpiring with the exception of my being admitted as a member of the company through the influence of Col Jarrot. Tuesday morning went to St Joseph and procured a few necessaries. Wednesday, spent in camp preparing to start the next day. Thursday after striking our tents and harnessing our mules we bade adieu to our camp and started on our journey, our course lay over very broken country nearly destitute of timber except in some of the water courses and ravines washed by the rains. The road however with some few exceptions, was excellent, but we had some steep hills to ascend and as we could not all prepare to leave camp at the same time and after getting under motion were detained several hours waiting for some of the heaviest waggons of the Company we made but small progress, about 15 miles. Camp'd by the side of a little brook running through a ravine and picketed our mules, at nightfall we brought all our mules into camp and fastened them to our waggon and having organized a guard to watch the camp we retired for the night. The Evening was quite cold and next morning the ground was covered with frost. Friday commenced our journey at 1½ past 6. Nothing worthy of remark occurring until we reached the banks of Wolf Creek in crossing which our foremost team stalled, after working some time to get it out of the mud we all commenced cutting brush to mend the road and after some 3 hours labour succeeded in crossing all our waggon not without some difficulty however and some danger to the mules. Found here several families of the Sac Indians Encamp'd by the Creek Before we arrived at

11 Fifteen to twenty miles a day was an average rate of progress.
this place some of our foremost horsemen had their horses stolen by the Indians. They had turned them out to graze and while their Backs were turned the Indians stole upon them and rode them off. They were recoverd however by a nephew of Col Jarrot who rode after them and bursted the cap of a pistol at one of the Indians. Camp'd on the opposite side of the Creek no other camping ground being within 20 miles.\textsuperscript{12} Stood guard this night for the first time, during the night the Indians had a regular pow wow and kept up a constant howling and screeching for several hours.

Saturday Apl 21st, made a start about 7 'o clock and travelld untill 4, nothing worthy of remark during the day except the running away of my team which however I succeeded in stopping after they had run about \( \frac{3}{4} \) of a mile. Campd in the middle of the prairie and were obliged to go some \( \frac{3}{4} \) of a mile for water and no timber in sight The night was rainy and uncomfortable. Several Indians were near us during the night watching for plunder

Sunday [April] the 22 made an early start this morning. My mules got loose during the night and I was detained in catching them so I was obliged to start without my breakfast, travelld till 4 o'clock and camp'd on the edge of a small water course where there was plenty of old grass and sufficient wood for our fires. From the computations made by our officers we are now over 50 miles from the Missouri and some 25 from the Blue River our place of destination. We are now getting into the Indian Country where there is some danger and we are obliged to be very cautious and bring our mules into camp at sundown. We have seen but 2 or 3 of them as yet on the road but we are told they are in the country in some numbers

Monday Apl 23d Made an early start this morning. Weather unpleasant and cold with a strong north west wind. We calculated to reach the Blue this day and we drove faster than usual in order to do so before night. We were disappointed however in our expectations and were obliged to camp

\textsuperscript{12}It was standard practice for every wagon train to form a circle at night and drive the stock inside after it had been fed. Wagons which had led the file one day (and so escaped the dust) dropped back to the end on the next day and worked forward accordingly. Jesse Applegate, \textit{A Day with the Cow Column} (Chicago, 1934), 5-17.
in the open prairie near some water holes but 2½ miles distant from any timber. Some of the party brought in a few branches on their mules and we made shift with them and what few weeds and wild sage roots we could gather to boil our coffee. The night was very cold and the Guard suffer'd extremely from the Weather.

Apl 24th Got in motion about ½ past 5, the weather getting warmer as the sun rose and as the day advanced becoming quite pleasant. Reached the Blue River about 10 o'clock and commenced crossing our wagons, this was soon accomplished as the River was quite low and at the ford not more than eight inches deep. The Banks were very steep however and we were obliged to let the wagons down with ropes. Camp'd on the opposite side and turned our mules out to grass. The pasturage is far from being good owing to the very unusually cold and backward weather and we shall probably be obliged to stay here some time there not being sufficient grass to warrant us in extending our journey any farther. The Country appears to be entirely deserted, no sign of Indians having been here this spring, though the frames of their wigwams stand about in every direction though not in great numbers, showing that they make this country their residence during some portion of the year. A most beautiful country here—sufficiently rolling to give variety to the scenery, and the green hillsides, and the river bottoms looking like vast cultivated meadows with a soil of unsurpassed fertility, but nearly destitute of timber except immediately on the banks of the streams owing to the grass being burnt every spring by the Indians which prevents the young trees from starting and kills those which have. There is but little water in the country and the streams are few and far between. Captain Lafferty one of our Company brought in several fine Buffalo fish this afternoon which he shot in a small lake about a mile from camp and we had a fish supper. Night chilly and cold.

Wednesday Apl 25th. Moved our camp this morning about a mile to a more convenient place, after which we spent the day in attending to camp duties and in digging a ditch to drain the small lake mentioned before in order to procure more fish. The weather was very pleasant this day though before night the sun became obscured and we had every indication of rain.
Thursday [April] 26th. Still in camp waiting for Doctor Linsky a gentleman who we were compelld to leave behind at St Joseph and whom we promised to wait for here. About 9 o clock quite an excitement was occasion'd in camp by the appearance of some horsemen approaching us from the west who from their appearance we supposed to be Indians. The company assembled rifles in hand but we were agreeably disappointed when the strangers approached us to find they were white men. They proved to be a party of trappers from Fort Laramie who were journeying to St Joseph with dispatches. Their arrival furnish'd us with an opportunity of writing a few lines to our friends in the States, an opportunity which I immediately took advantage of, and they left us with a general assortment of letters for the Post office. They gave us a small quantity of fresh Buffalo meat which they killed 15 miles west of the Blue River. We were very much mistaken when we gave the name of Blue River to the stream on which we are at present encamp'd. The Blue River so the trappers tell us is forty miles distant and this stream near us is call'd the Nemahaw [Nemaha River]. I do not know whether I spell it right but so it is pronounced. This evening 2 ox and 1 mule team arrived from St Joseph. They informed us that Doctor Linsky was on the road and we determined to wait 1 more Day for him.

Friday [April 27]. The 3 waggons left this morning for the Blue spent the day in preparations for the next days journey. The weather during the day time is quite pleasant but the nights are cold and very disagreeable. The grass grows but slowly though the hill sides begin to look green and resemble at present beautiful meadow land. Quantities of Hop vines are found in some places Gooseberrys Wild Plum Raspberrys and some very beautifull spring flowers which would be an ornament to any garden but which I have never seen in one, are found in all directions. There are great quantities of venemous reptiles here and in some places the ground is perforated with snake holes, principally Rattlesnakes of which we kill a number every day. This Evening 7 more waggons arrived from St Jo They informed us that Doctor Linsky got as far as Wolf Creek where he broke an axletree and was compelld to return for repairs. We accordingly decided not to wait but to proceed immediately for the Blue.
Saturday [April] 28th  Broke up camp very early in the morning & proceeded on our journey. Drove pretty rapidly untill 3 o clock untill we arrived at the place where the 3 waggons spoken of before had camp'd the night previous. Here we determined to camp also and accordingly did so on the banks of a small creek. travell'd about 20 miles. Determined to start very early on the morrow in order to make the Blue in good season.

Sunday [April] 29th  a cold and disagreeable morning, waked up the camp at 4 o clock and we were soon busy in preparations for an early start. About 1/2 past 4 as I was standing by my fire boiling some coffee I heard the report of a gun very near me it appearing to be but the other side of a waggon about 8 paces distant. Simultaneous with the report I heard some one exclaim "Sacre" "Oh mon Dieu" and immediately afterwards the body of a man projected itself from the back part of the waggon and fell with a heavy squelch to the ground. I immediately exclaimed "Theres a dead man" and ran to the spot where a number had already collected. It proved to be a young Frenchman Nicholas Boismenue by name who drove a team for Col Jarrot. He had crawled into the back part of his waggon and finding his gun there had attempted to draw it towards him with the muzzle directed towards his Breast something coming in contact with the lock raised the hasp which coming down on the cap exploded the gun the contents of which he received in his Breast ranging downwards towards his hip and causing his death almost instantly. From the time of the report being heard until we collected around his body was scarce a moment but when I looked in his face his jaw had fallen and no sign of life could be perceived. This sudden and shocking accident detained us some hours and cast a gloom over the whole company. We determined to take the Corpse with us to the Blue and bury it there and accordingly about 6 o clock we started on our journey. We reached the Blue River13 about 4 o clock in the afternoon and proceeded to dig a grave but did not complete it at sundown. The 3 Waggons first mentiond succeeded in crossing the river about 2 hours before we came.

13 The Big Blue (originally the Blue Earth River) is an affluent of the Kansas. It rises in Nebraska and runs in a southwestern direction into Kansas. The route from St. Joseph crossed the stream near the present site of Marysville, Kansas. Sawyer, Way Sketches, 25n.
up. It being late however when we arrived we did not attempt to cross but encampd on the near side of the river. The weather during the morning had been chilly and cold but the afternoon was warm and the wind blew from the south west quite fresh while in the north large masses of clouds were collected and the lightning was seen to gleam every few minutes leading us to expect a shower. The wind during the night increased to a gale and shifted to the north, becoming intensely cold and Blowing down tents and waggon covers in our camp in all directions. We had no rain however but we passed a very uncomfortable night. The 7 waggons noticed before came up with us about 10 o clock in the evening and crossed the river during the night, there being a fine moon and as light as day. They are a company from Pittsburgh and are driving energetic fellows. The Captain of the company is said to have accompanied Bryant in his journey to that country in 1846.

Monday April 30th The wind continued to blow hard and very cold until 12 o clock when it gradually died away and the sun shone out bright and warm. We buried our unfortunate companion about 10 o clock and then prepared to cross the river I took some short pieces of wood and laid them across my waggon Bed piling my boxes on the top of them and thus carrying my load over perfectly safe and dry. While we were crossing some Eighteen or twenty ox waggons arrived at the ford and commenced crossing They all succeeded in getting over before night and camp'd near us. The Pittsburgh waggons left this afternoon and there is one or two companies ahead of us on the Independence Road.

May 1st. The wind as usual commenced blowing again before day and was very cold. We are obliged to stay here 1 Day to cut the tire of one of our Waggons and repair the tongue of another. We have Blacksmiths tools and Bellows with us and we have burnt sufficient charcoal since we have been here to last for all the probable exigencies of the trip. I forgot to mention that Doctor Linsky came up with us yesterday, and our company is now complete, one waggon has left us since we have been here being dissatisfied with our rate of travel. Some 3 or 4 ox teams and 5 or 6 six and 4 horse teams arrived today, succeeded in crossing and the
most of them have gone on. It is very necessary in my opinion not to let many more pass us but to make an effort to be among the first. The tide of emigration flowing across the plains this season will be like the descent of the locusts in Egypt consuming every green thing and those who come last will fare but badly. Several more waggons arrived at the Blue just at night and in attempting to cross one of them was broken and left in the River all night.

Wednesday May 2nd  Broke up camp and left about 6 in the morning, travelld till 4 passing the junction of our road with the Independence road about 10. Nothing worthy of remark  Grass scarce and backward. Weather cold and disagreeable.

May 3d. Left camp at 5 and at ½ past 7 arrived at a small creek (called Wyeths Creek) on the opposite side of which we found 7 or 8 of the Ox Waggons which passed us some days before just leaving their camp. After watering our teams we drove on till 12 when we determined to rest our mules and turn them out to graze. At 2 resumed our trip and kept on till ½ past 4. Appearance of rain, high wind and very cold, heavy rain during the night, all nearly froze

Friday [May] 4th  Morning very cold made an early start and passed the ox teams spoken of before  Passed several creeks or water courses one of which is called the Big Sandy, there was but little water in any of them, though in a rainy time they no doubt are respectable streams. Campd on the Banks of one of them  Weather cloudy and damp and changing in a moment from hot to cold, in fact the most variable weather I ever met with.

Saturday May 5th. Started early and travelld till 11, turned our mules out to graze in the Blue River Valley which we reached about 9, remained 3 hours and started again. Just ahead of us came upon the Horse teams which passd us at the Big Blue River just turning out from camp  Drove on till 4 and campd close by the River which is a beautilfull stream of fine water but the soil of the country in the vicinity is poor, compared to that through which we have been travelling. Found here great flocks of Plovers which we killd in great
numbers. Found on my arrival at camp I had been driving my waggon without a linch pin in one of the hind wheels. Rather a hazardous affair. Fortunately I had an extra sett. Appearance of Rain during the night. Scenery very pleasing though not very romantic. Trees are very scarce none being found except on the margin of the stream. We find great quantities of Buffalo Bones and Elk Horns scattered over the Plains, the relics of the at one time undisputed possessors of this vast country, they make their appearance here still but are not found in any numbers until we reach the Valley of the Platte River. Found great quantities of Rose Bushes and Wild garlic or Chives growing in this valley. I took the opportunity of making several fine salads of the latter which were very excellent.

Sunday [May] 6th. Started at 4, and driving on pretty rapidly we came up with and passd the camp of Ox Waggons from Iowa, 19 in number. Shortly after they passd us while we were nooning and we did not overtake them again. We drive very slow and I am very much dissatisfied with our progress. Grass is very poor as yet however and perhaps it is best to be cautious. Campd at 3 O clock on the bank of the river at a beautifull spot and spent the remainder of the day in an appropriate manner. Had a slight shower during the night sufficient to lay the dust.

Monday [May] 7th. Rose at 4 and started on. In about an hour we passd the large train of ox wagons 19 in number mentioned before which during the night had been increased by the addition of 4 wagons making them number 23. They were taking their Breakfast and their Oxen were scattered for 3 miles over the Bottom. Our appearance hurried them a little and they commenced catching up and yoking their teams and soon started on. They hold their own with us remarkably well but some of our teams are very heavily loaded and we do not drive much more than 2 miles per hour. About 9 we stoppd for Breakfast when the Oxen came up and passd us but they turned out shortly after and we passd them in turn. Shortly after we left the valley of the “Little Blue River” and struck across the country for the Platte some 20 miles distant. We drove on till 5 and campd by the side of a very shallow lake on the top of a ridge where the water grass grew in great plenty and the water not being 8 inches deep the mules
soon filled themselves. We found the mosquitoes very troublesome during the night. During the afternoon we met with a party of Indians some 25 in number mostly women and children not more than 7 or 8 being men. They pretended to be nearly starving and we furnished them with a small quantity of provisions. Their Chief could speak a few words of our language and gave us to understand that he with the aid of our provisions would be able to make a good supper and sleep that night, but notwithstanding this we thought it proper to be unusually strict on guard as they are great thieves and seldom let an opportunity to steal pass unimproved.

Tuesday [May] 8  Started at 4 and after driving a few miles came in sight of the low sand Hills which skirt the valley of the Platte River. We reached the Hills about 9 and shortly after the valley opened to our view. At 11, we reached the River Bank and turning out our mules we got our breakfast and dinner at the same time. There is an immense Island in the river at the point at which we struck it called Grand Island at or opposite the upper end of which there is a military post called Fort Kearney or Fort Childs. I could not find out which was the right name but it is either the one or the other of the above. This River though very long and wide is not navigable, the channel being a perfect bed of moving quicksand and though in some places nearly 2 miles wide the water is but from 6 inches to 2 feet in depth. In the afternoon we arrived within 4 miles of the Fort and camped for the night. Some of our men went fishing with a net in a little Brook which runs into the river at this place and caught some very fine fish. There is no timber on this side of the Platte river and we were obliged to use Buffalo Chips (of which there is great quantities) and what little drift

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14 In 1846 an act of Congress had directed the establishment of this fort for the protection of Oregon emigrants. The actual military post was not created until 1848, at which time it was named after Brigadier General Thomas Childs. By order of the government, however, its name was changed to Fort Kearney, in honor of Stephen Watts Kearny, of Mexican War fame. The early misspelling is now statutory. Paden, *Wake of the Prairie Schooner*, 83-84. For an excellent summary of this fort's role in the gold rush, see Lyle E. Mantor's "Fort Kearney and the Westward Movement," *Nebraska History*, XXIX (September, 1948), 175-207.

15 *Bois de vache*, or buffalo chips, furnished a good fire, and the smell released in its combustion was not repulsive. David Rohrer Leeper, *The Argonauts of 'Forty-nine: Some Recollections of the Plains and the Diggings* (Reprint, Columbus, O., 1950), 18.
wood we could find on the Banks for fuel. On the opposite side of the river there is considerable timber as also on some of the many Islands in the river. The soil of the Platte Valley is quite sandy and not very good but it is coverd in summer with fine grass, furnishing excellent food for the Buffalo which in some parts of the Valley are very plentifull. We have seen none as yet owing no doubt to the poorness of the grass. The ground however is coverd with their Bones showing that they in former times made this valley their head quarters. Thus far we have killd no game tho we have seen several Elk and herds of Antelopes ar[e] seen every day. These last however are so very fleet and shy that they are seldom killd. They distance in a moment the fastest greyhound and as there is no timber a person can seldom approach within gunshot.

Wednesday [May] 9th Started about 8 in the morning and soon arrived at the fort where we stoppd and purchased a few necessaries, flour, and provisions The Fort is principally built of sods cut from the surface of the valley and most of the Buildings are of the same materiel As we approached the fort we met 2 Dragoons who had just left with the mail. This furnishd an opportunity to some of our company of sending letters home but I had not time to take advantage of the opportunity. Continued our journey about 15 miles above the fort and campd for the night. This place is 250 miles from St Joseph—From St Joseph to Big Blue River 138 miles. From Big to Little Blue 40 do From Little Blue to the point at which we leave its valley 45 do From thence to Fort Kearney 27, total 250. Had a heavy thunder shower during this night. We learned from the garrison at the fort that there are some 50 teams ahead of us on the road, the first teams passd 3 days before us.

Thursday [May] 10th. At sunrise this morning we discovered the Ox teams we passd on the Blue campd on the bank of the river 2 miles below us. There are 2 companies of them 10 in one and 23 in the other which together with our 13 and 54 before us make the number of waggons we know of in the valley at present 100. Started at 8 and continued our journey not much occurring worthy of remark. Found the skeleton of a man on the plain a short distance from the road,
but whether white man or Indian we were not scientific enough to determine. The skull had evidently been fractured. Col Jarrot went on a hunt and returned in the afternoon with an Antelope which he was fortunate enough to kill, he saw no Buffalo however we campd at 4 having travelld some 20 miles. Col Jarrots heavy teams are beginning to fail and I am more and more dissatisfied with our progress. My team however is perfectly fresh and capable of performing as much now as at any time during our route. We found grass yesterday and today better than at any place during our journey. The fine rain of the night before will help the grass which has sufferd from dry weather and I hope we shall find it more plentiful than heretofore. Just before we drove into camp we came in sight of a train of Ox and mule waggons which we have gained rapidly upon and shall probably pass tomorrow as they campd in sight. During the night the wolves indulged us with a serenade and howled in concert for several hours most inharmoniously. They are very plentiful in the sand hills which skirt the valley.

Friday [May] 11th Started at 8 and drove along slowly, weather cloudy windy and disagreeable, towards noon however it moderated and became more pleasant—in the afternoon came in sight of, caught up, and passed the train ahead of us and campd a few miles beyond them—2 of our heaviest teams nearly gave out this day. For the first time on our journey we saw Buffalo, and in immense quantities but entirely out of our reach they being on the opposite bank of the river. I dare say there were several thousand in the herds we saw—4 or 5 of the hunters attached to the company we passd waded across the river for the purpose of killing some of them but night soon coming on we did not learn their success. We shall try our luck tomorrow.

Saturday May 12th, this morning the camp was aroused by the guard calling out that the Buffalo were crossing the river. On getting up we found that such was the case and our hunters were immediately on the qui vive. about 150 had crossed within sight of camp and numbers were in the river wading across. As our men appeared on the bank ready to give them a reception those in the river turned back and the others ran for the Hills skirting the valley on our side
of the river. Col Jarrot immediately set out in pursuit of them leaving the camp without any guard. Unfortunately the mules and Horses attracted by the unusual sight of the Buffalo in the river ran to see what they were and a partial “stampede” took place in which some 10 mules and 3 or 4 Horses were lost including one of mine. The mules were recovered however in about an hour and the horses also were found late in the day keeping company with the Buffalo. This day we had the first grand sight of Buffalo. I had always discredited the stories I had heard of their great numbers but I do so no longer as I am certain I saw during the day at least 20,000. They covered the vast plain for miles, the surface of the earth being literally black with them. Col Jarrot killed 2 this day 1 in the morning which we were constrained to leave and 1 in the afternoon a portion of which was brought into camp and we had fresh meat for supper. We found it very tough however the Buffalo being an old one and a Bull into the bargain. I did not relish it much. Camped a short distance from a party of traders from Fort Laramie bound to the settlements with 5 waggons loaded with Buffalo robes furs and peltries. The Horse teams mentioned before were also camped but a short distance ahead of us. The land in this valley is quite poor and apparently at this time is suffering from drought although by digging 3 or 4 feet below the surface water is sure to be found. The surface of the plain is in some places covered with salt which probably descends from the neighboring Hills and the water which is found by digging is brackish and impregnated with iron and sulphur. The river water is very good however, and very much like Missouri water though an Eastern man would as soon drink out of a ditch it is so turbid and sandy.

Sunday [May] 13th The road in this valley is completely alive with teams and the nearer we approach the south fork [of the Platte] the more so it becomes. There are now more than 100 waggons within 50 miles and in 1 month from this time over 1000 will have passed on the road. Met this day another party of traders from Fort Laramie bound to St Joseph. I was sorry I had no letters prepared to send in by them such an opportunity for transmitting them not often occurring on this road. Crossed several deep hollows or ravines this day (the land becoming more elevated as we ascend the
Overland: St. Louis to the California Gold Field

valley) and passed also the first timber we have seen on this side. My Mules this afternoon took fright at the report of a gun and ran away with me in the waggon. On their first plunge I lost the reins of the leaders and as they ran down Hill I found it difficult to stop them but I succeeded in doing so after they had ran about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. No damage done. We had a slight shower during the night with some tremendous thunder and lightning.

Monday [May] 14. Passed the junction of the South fork this day about 9 o clock 110 miles above the point where we first struck the river. We have yet to ascend this stream some distance before we can cross with our wagons, at 10 met a party of Mormons from the Salt Lake proceeding to St Joseph. They gave great accounts of the Gold region and mention’d an instance of one man collecting $750 worth of gold in a day.\(^{16}\) They had been 30 days on the road and were carrying the mail. Travelled till 5 and camped in a very poor spot, miserable grass, worse water and no fuel but damp Buffalo Chips.

Tuesday [May] 15. Travelled very slow this day Col Jarrots mules not being able to proceed very fast. Stopped about 10 o clock to rest the mules on the Banks of the river and while remaining there the Ox train of 10 wagons which for the last 40 miles has been close to our heels passed us and from present appearances we shall not overtake them again. Travelled till 5 making during the day about 15 miles and camped on the Bank of the river. Weather very threatening and every appearance of rain.

Wednesday [May] 16. Morning rainy and cold, being apprehensive of a rise in the river Col Jarrot decided to cross where we are without proceeding to the usual crossing, accordingly about 9 after having first crossed on Horseback and staked out a path, we commenced crossing (most of the wagons doubling their teams) and by 11 we were all on the opposite Bank. The Water in the deepest parts was about 2 feet

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\(^{16}\) Collecting gold worth this sum was entirely within the realm of probability. During 1848, the North Fork of the American, the Yuba, the Feather, the Stanislaus, and the Trinity rivers often yielded $500 to $5,000 for a single day's labor. Rodman W. Paul, *California Gold: The Beginning of Mining in the Far West* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), 55.
deep and the bottom of the river being quicksand it was necessary to keep constantly progressing to prevent sinking as the sand washed away from under the wheels very rapidly. Campd immediately after crossing and remained all day at the landing. Continued stormy all day. The Ox train of 23 waggons passd in the afternoon on the opposite side and campd 2 miles above us. Evening cold wet and disagreeable.

Thursday [May] 17. Heavy rain during the night and untill 11. 0 clock. The evening previous 5 mule teams hove in sight on the opposite bank and as they appeard anxious to cross, some of our party went to direct them to the ford. They proved to be acquaintances of Col Jarrot from Illinois and are anxious to join our company. left our camp about 7 and moved to a higher spot. it rained so hard that we gave up all idea of travelling any more that day. At 10 the 5 waggons joined us at our camp and remained with us till next morning. Cleard up about 11 which gave us a chance to dry our beds and tents but during the night it rained again and our tents got as wet as ever. An alarm of Indians during the night. Camp aroused and Mules picketed in the corral.

Friday [May] 18 left camp at 6 and travelld slowly up the valley crossing some deep sandy gullies and water courses on our way. 4 out of the 5 waggons finding they could outtravell us left us and went on before and I was very much tempted to join them, the other one remained with us and probably will continue to do so. disagreeable and windy day and heavy rain during the night.

Saturday [May] 19th Started at 6 and at 11 came in sight of the Sioux Indian village situated at the principal ford of the river where the road strikes across for the North Fork [of the Platte]. While we were resting our Mules the whole tribe came to visit us and after making them some presents quite a trade was struck up in articles of Indian manufacture. Col Jarrot succeeded in purchasing 4 or 5 mules in exchange for his worn out Horses. The Indians were generally a fair looking set of men and some of the squaws were quite handsome. got under weigh again about 1 the skirts of a heavy thunder shower passing us at the time and wetting us with rain. The ascent up the Bluffs which skirt
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the river was quite steep and in some places very heavy drawing on account of the sand. Upon arriving at the summit of the Bluffs we were gratified with a magnificent spectacle. A tornado was whirling across the prairie [sic] and though there was but little on which to exert its fury still the com- motion of the clouds and the immense masses of vapour whirling around with inconceivable rapidity and scattered in fragments while the roaring of the wind could be distinctly heard at 2 miles distance, furnish'd a sight seldom witness'd and excited sentiments of mingled admiration and awe. After the tornado had passed clouds of Grasshoppers fell from the sky which had been drawn up from the surface of the prairie by the Whirlwind. The Cloud presented the appearance of a long funnel the small end downwards as black as ink and at times reaching the ground around which the fragments of clouds where [were] whirled with the speed of light while all the clouds in the vicinity seemed to be attracted to the centre to swell the volume of the tornado. Its course was towards the north East and fortunate for us was it that it did not pass near or over our wagons which had it so occur'd would have been scatter'd to the four winds of Heaven. Campd at 5 the weather presenting every appearance of a tempestuous night Dark clouds lay all around the Horizon from which the lightning flash'd incessantly while the thunder rumbled in the distance. The country around us is sterile and barren no timber or water and perhaps sufficient pasture to feed a flock of sheep but nothing else.

Sunday [May] 20. Made an early start as there was no grass at our camp and travelld untill 10 at which time we reachd Ash Hollow, a ravine some miles in length with steep rocky sides and sandy bottom fringed with Ash trees and stunted Bushes opening on the valley of the North Fork. Here we found some grass and turned out our mules to graze. Previous to our reaching this place one of our men shot a Buffalo and we accordingly had plenty of fresh Beef which unlike the first brought in was of excellent quality. We got under weigh from the Hollow about 10 and travelled up the banks of the North Fork untill 5, encountering on our way a severe thunder storm though of short duration. The rain which fell was very cold and like the drippings from some
immense Iceberg which I could almost fancy was suspended in the air over our heads and that we were receiving a full share of its melted chrrystal. Upon arriving at camp I discovered I had lost my Frying Pan—quite a serious loss, where I cannot readily supply myself with another. We found excellent grass on this river which was duly appreciated by our hungry animals but at our camp and for miles above and below there is no wood for fuel and we found wet Buffalo chips (our only substitute) not a very combustible article. Some of our company found a portion of a dry cedar tree with which we managed to cook our supper, and we turned in for the night. The valley of this River is here fringed with Steep Hills which from their resemblance to fortifications are called Castle Bluffs and extend up the River for about 25 miles when they assume a different character & are gradual in their ascent. The soil is poor being principally sand, over which the travelling is very heavy, with occasionally a strip of swampy ground equally as bad to get over. On the higher parts of the valley we found clusters of beautiful flowers scattered over the surface of the ground any of which would be an ornament to any garden but with the names of which I was entirely unacquainted. Wild onions or Chives grow also in some places which we gather for Salads.

Monday [May] 21st  Left camp about 7 O clock nothing worthy of remark occurring on the road beyond travelling over long strips of sandy road in which our wheels sank from 6 to 8 inches. We arrived at night at the termination of Castle Bluffs where the Sand Hills commence, a cold disagreeable day with 8 hours of chilly rain.

Tuesday [May] 22. Encountered on this day as on the preceding a heavy sandy and swampy road and cross'd a number of deep gullies washed out by the rains from the neighboring Hills. Passd also a single ash tree of large dimensions called the lone tree from the fact of its being the only tree to be seen in the valley for 40 miles. One of our company shot an antelope this day and I found the meat to be the most delicious I had ever tasted. It is very similar to venison only more delicate and tender.
[Wednesday, May 23.]* Nothing occurrd worthy of remark this day untill the afternoon when a large Black cloud rose in the west portending a severe storm which overtook us just as we had crossed a sleugh half filld with water on a piece of low swampy ground. Finding the storm likely to prove very severe, we decided on camping, and commenced unharnessing our Mules in the rain While we were engaged with our teams there descended the most terrific shower of Hail I had ever witnessed some of the stones as large as Pigeons Eggs the falling of which on our Mules drove them perfectly frantic and had not the most of them been tied to the waggons there would have been a universal stampede Some 20 of them got loose and ran for several miles but as the Hail did not last long they were brought back in the course of an Hour. After the Hail the Hills in the neighborhood were as white as if coverd with Snow in midwinter and continued so for 4 or 5 hours. The Wind then shifted to the N. E. and a cold wintery rain commenced falling which continued all night.

[Thursday, May 24.]* At day Break this morning I was awoke by an old Steamboatman in our company taking the soundings in our camp and calling out “By the mark twain” and “no Bottom”. On getting up I found our camp perfectly deluged with water and as the rain still continued falling and we had no wood to kindle fires our situation was disagreeable in the Extreme. We remaind encamped untill 2 PM when the rain somewhat abating we moved to a more elevated position which we found at the distance of 3 miles. Here we campd again and after procuring some fuel from the Hills about 2 miles distant we cooked our suppers and retired to rest. The rain continued all night

[Friday, May 25.]* Still continued raining and we thought it best to remain in camp untill the weather cleared up. About 10 AM. 2 ox teams passd us and as the rain somewhat abated Col Jarrot decided on moving forward as soon as dinner was over. Getting an early dinner we commenced breaking up our camp our motions being much accelerated by the appearance of another train approaching us in the valley below Soon after we started the rain commenced again and continued during the whole afternoon making our journey

* See note 17.
very unpleasant and drenching us all with water. Campd just beyond the 2 Ox teams which passd us in morning, making about 10 miles, the weather at night partially cleared up and gave us the promise of a fair day on the morrow.

[Saturday, May 26.]* Error in dates to be rectified by consulting the previous dates.¹⁷

Friday [May] 25th The weather this morning was clear but intensely cold and a heavy white frost covered the ground. We took Breakfast tolerably early and started on. The celebrated land mark called the “Court House” or “Church” being visible some 12 miles ahead while still further in the distance “Chimney Rock” towerd up in the air looking from our position like a reed or pole stuck up on the prairie Found the road tolerably good during the morning notwithstanding the previous heavy rains and at ½ past 11 we turned our mules out to graze nearly opposite the Court House. This is an immense Bluff which rises from the plain solitary and alone at the distance of some 6 miles from the River and from the regularity of its shape and the appearance of a dome on its summit presenting a very imposing appearance has acquired the name it bears. It is the first of a series of Bluffs very similar in character which skirt the valley for 30 miles any of which would be esteemed great curiosities were they not so completely eclipsed by the magnitude and imposing appearance of the first. Castles, towers, frowning Battlements and fortifications of Natures own handiwork in endless variety are seen at every step, all of them bearing a resemblance to solid masonry though in reality they are nothing but clay, but that of so solid and cement like consistence that the heavy rains have but little effect on it. We calculated to camp at Chimney Rock but owing to the very swampy and wet ground we encountered in the afternoon we did not

* See note 17.

¹⁷ Evidently Berrien was confused about the day of the week in the dates the editors have marked with asterisks, for he lined out parts or all of these dates and wrote in “corrections” which he also crossed out. A reading of the diary indicates that possibly Berrien would sometimes miss writing in his diary for a few days. So perhaps in making back entries, he was uncertain about the days of the week on which May 23, 24, and 25 fell. The editors cannot explain how Berrien arrived at two entries marked Friday, May 25. Since reproducing the lined out dates and “corrections” is not feasible, the proper dates have been enclosed in brackets and marked by asterisks. (May 23, 1849, was indeed a Wednesday although Berrien wasn’t sure.)
succeed in reaching it by about 3 miles. Our journey this day proved very hard on our teams, and they were completely tired out when we arrived at camp. Night chilly and disagreeable and white frost in the morning.

Saturday [May] 26 passed Chimney Rock distant 12 miles from the Court House an hour after we started and I was very much vexed that I could not examine it at a closer point of view than from the road but having walked 24 miles the previous day and worn several Blisters on my feet I was obliged to restrain my curiosity and make my steps as few as possible. It is certainly a great curiosity and presents the appearance of a large moundlike elevation from the centre of which rises a tall column like the flue of a iron foundry and it is said to be over 250 feet high. Though called a Rock it is nothing but clay such as all the Bluffs in the neighborhood are composed of. Travelld all day through very heavy and swampy roads and at night campd a few miles beyond Scotts Bluffs at which point the road leaves the river and strikes over the Hills for some distance. A portion of our train got under weigh again at 9 this evening and drove on 10 miles to a Blacksmith shop situated near a small Branch where the road ascends the Hills. Col Jarrot wishd to get some work done and was fearfull some of the waggons just behind us might get ahead of him. The remainder of our train myself among the number remained w[h]ere we were untill next morning.

Sunday [May] 27. Started about 6 and at 10 arrived at the Blacksmith shop and joined our train. While remaining here nearly 40 waggons passd us on the way to the diggings

18 For convincing evidence that this landmark was by far the most written about of noteworthy natural sights on the trail, see Merrill J. Mattes, “Chimney Rock on the Oregon Trail,” *Nebraska History*, XXXVI (March, 1955), 1-26.

19 The looming escarpments of Scott's Bluff are composed of indurated clay and sandstone. The site was named after a clerk with a fur trader's caravan by the name of Hiram Scott. The details of Scott's story are not certain, but it is believed that when he became incapacitated by a wound he was deserted by his associates some sixty miles north of the place later named for him. The following year, 1829, these same men came upon his bleached bones beneath these jutting cliffs. The landmark is a grisly reminder of the abandoned wretch who somehow dragged himself sixty miles seeking aid. Merrill J. Mattes, “Hiram Scott, Fur Trader,” *ibid.*, XXVI (July-September, 1945), 127-162.
and 2 trains camped near us at nightfall. As I had brought shoes for my mules with me I took advantage of the Blacksmith to have them nailed on for which I paid 25 cts for each shoe.

Monday [May] 28 Got under weigh about 9 and travelled 12 or 14 miles to Horse Creek a small stream emptying into the Platte River where we camped early. The 2 trains mentioned before passed us at this place. One of our teams ran away during the morning and in making a short turn the waggon to which they were attached became cramped and one of the wheel mules was thrown under the wheel from which he was extricated with a broken leg. He was left behind to furnish a feast to the wolves which are plenty in this region.

Tuesday [May] 29th Nothing worthy of special remark occurred during this day until the afternoon when we were caught in a sudden and severe thunder storm accompanied with Hail which turned to a settled rain and lasted during the night making it very disagreeable in camp. The country through which we are now passing is very poor being principally sand though occasionally we pass some very fertile Bottoms where the grass is fine and our mules fill themselves in a short time, some of the Hillsides are covered with pepper grass and wild mustard. The Prairie Pea too occasionally makes its appearance and being now in bloom the air is scented with its perfume. It would be a beautiful plant for a garden. Very many other beautiful plants and flowers are found on the road different from any I have ever seen and I regret I am not a Botanist enough to describe them. Some of the river Bottoms too have been heavily timbered some little of which still remains so that we have no difficulty in procuring fuel. We camped this evening opposite an old trading post which is at present deserted some 15 or 20 miles from Fort Laramie.

Wednesday [May] 30th The rain still continuing we remained in camp an hour after Breakfast when the weather clearing up we caught our mules and proceeded on our journey. The road was very heavy owing to the rain but it soon dried. At noon we turned out to graze in a Bottom
near the river where the Blue grass was very fine. While here a train which had been pushing to overtake us drove up and camped within a ½ a mile. While I was engaged in guarding the mules a young medical student attached to their company accompanied by several others came near me and discovering the remains of an Indian, in a tree covered up in a Buffalo Robe they commenced climbing the tree and proceeded to rip open the Skin and examine the remains. The practice of suspending the bodies of their dead relatives in a tree is very common among the Indians in this vicinity and we have passed numbers of these singular graves if I may make use of the term. These remains they hold very sacred and any violation of them is sure to be resented, if detected, on the perpetration. The Skin contained besides the bones of the Indian all his most necessary implements, tomahawk, pipe, tobacco, matches, and knife besides many little trinkets. On a neighboring limb of a tree the skull of the favorite Horse of the deceased was tied with a string. I found out from the young student that he had opened every grave he had found on his journey, a violation of the dead for which some innocent person may yet suffer and I told him I thought he was doing very wrong. We have learnt from several persons we have met on the road that the Crow Indians in whose country we are at present are out in large war parties and are hovering along the road we purpose to travel. They burnt up a small trading post this side of Fort Laramie 2 weeks ago and we are cautioned to be on our guard against them. Should they happen to find our young student engaged as I have described I think he will never see California. The weather continued cloudy the whole day accompanied with a high cold wind. I forgot to mention that a few miles after we left Scotts Bluffs we were favored with a sight for the first time of Laramie Peak and several other smaller peaks of the Rocky Mountains distant upwards of 150 miles and looking like dark clouds on the edge of the Horizon. By the aid of a telescope we could distinctly see the snow piled on their summits apparently 50 or 60 feet deep. Owing to the cloudy weather we were not able to see the peak again until this evening when the sky cleared in the west affording us a fine view. About 3 'O clock we descended from the Hills over which we had been travelling into the valley of Laramie River and came in sight of the mud walls of Fort St John a trading post one mile
from Fort Laramie. Shortly after we crossed Laramie River and came in sight of the Fort which is situated on its banks and is a large square enclosure constructed of adobes or sun-dried bricks with walls some 3 or 4 feet thick with turrets at each corner. Here we stopped for some little time as Col Jarrot wished to dispose of some of his waggons and purchase more mules having decided to pack a portion of his provisions over the mountains in order to lighten the loads in his waggons and be able to make better time. He was disappointed however in his hopes as there were no animals to dispose of and he could not give his provisions or waggons away much less sell them for what they were worth. The Superintendent told me he had 20,000 lbs of Bacon in the Fort left there by trains ahead of us which he would be glad to dispose of at 1 cent per lb, and if any of us were short of provisions we could get a short distance below the Fort on the bank of the River 800 lbs of good Bacon thrown out by some waggons, and which he would not take the trouble to send for. He had flour for sale at $2.50 per 100 lbs and several waggons had been given him, the owners having no teams to haul them. In short any thing we wished to get rid of we were obliged to sacrifice there being no chance of procuring any thing in return. Drove about a mile above the Fort and camped near the river. Here we found the ground strewed with Boxes.

Of all the forts scattered over the West, few saw as much history as Fort Laramie. Actually there was no single Fort Laramie, but a succession of them. The first construction on the site was the log stockade, Fort William, built by fur traders William Sublette and Robert Campbell in 1834. By 1841 Fort William had badly deteriorated, and the American Fur Company, which now possessed it, constructed a more pretentious adobe-walled post christened Fort John. Like its predecessor, the new fort was popularly known as “Fort Laramie.” David L. Hieb, Fort Laramie National Monument, Wyoming (National Park Service Historical Handbook Series, No. 20; Washington, D.C., 1954), 3-7. Approximately one month after Berrien visited the fort, the United States government purchased the post from the American Fur Company for $4,000. This entirely new chapter in Fort Laramie’s notable history is expertly retraced in Raymond W. Settle (ed.), The March of the Mounted Riflemen... (Northwest Historical Series, Vol. III; Glendale, Calif., 1940).

It would appear that Berrien misunderstood that Fort John and Fort Laramie were one and the same. The structure which he identifies as Fort John was probably the shell of old Fort Platte. This post had been abandoned since 1845, very likely because it could not meet the competition of the American Fur Company. Robert W. Richmond, “Developments Along the Overland Trail from the Missouri River to Fort Laramie, before 1845,” Nebraska History, XXXIII (September, 1952), 162-164. For a comprehensive work on Fort Laramie, see LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis M. Young, Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890 (Glendale, Calif., 1938).
trunks extra axletrees and iron work for waggons, planks, waggon-wheels and extra articles of various kinds thrown out by the trains ahead of us. Here we decided upon remaining 1 day also in order to lighten up and prepare ourselves for the ascent of the mountains over which we shall soon have to pass. The Road thus far (a distance of 650 miles from St Joseph) is considering its length and the little trouble taken in making and repairing it the best in the world. But of the road across the mountains from this place I shall be better able to speak after I have travell'd it. The air this evening was very cold and chilly and reminded us that the snow-capt summit of Laramie Peak was near us, filling the air with its frosty influence.

Thursday [May] 31st  Remained in camp all day lightening up our waggon by the sacrifice of a great deal of property which was thrown out and left behind. Our camp was strewed with trunks Boxes tools of different kinds tents and tent poles, Waggons & Gold Washers, Blacksmiths Bellows stoves chains and iron work of all kinds. The amount of property left here by the owners occasioned us to call the spot Camp Sacrifice. Several trains passd us while we remained here Weather very pleasant during the day but the night cold.

Friday June 1st  Left our camp about 7 and shortly after commenced ascending the Black Hills as they are call'd though they are any thing but black. We ascended and descended some very steep Hills on which we found very good grass but neither water or timber and it was not until 3 o'clock in the afternoon that we found any. At this time we came to a fine spring of water at the foot of a Bluff in a sandy ravine ½ a mile distant from the road where we watered our thirsty mules and then proceeded onwards. The road with the exception of some few sandy gullies and some very long tedious Hills was very fine and equal to the best gravel road in the states. Campd at night on the Banks of a shallow creek call'd Dry timber Creek, where we found plenty of wood and water but indifferent grass. The Hills and Bluffs during a portion of this days journey were very pretty and

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\[Superscript 21\] This range is now called the Laramie Mountains and should not be confused with the Black Hills to the north which overlap eastern Wyoming and South Dakota.
romantic in the extreme in their appearance. They are com-
posed of a chalky rock resembling rotten stoni [sic] in
appearance and are dotted over here and there, with scatter-
ing pine trees, the plains at the Base of the Bluffs are coverd
with fragments of their Branches, which furnish splendid
fuel for camping purposes. The country is quite barren
generally though occasionally we found good grass, and a
scarcity of water is felt on the road.

Saturday [June] 2nd. Broke up camp about 6 the road
leading along the Banks of the creek mention'd before. This
creek we were obliged to cross 3 times in about 5 miles after
which we left it and struck off to the right through a valley
between 2 ranges of low Hills. We travelld up this valley
till we came to a very steep Hill forming the dividing ridge
between 2 valleys and after ascending to its summit, we
descended into the opposite valley by the most difficult,
dangerous and abrupt Hill we have met with on our journey.
While on the top of this Hill we had a most magnificent view
of mountain scenery with Laramie Peak in the distance. At
4 campd on the Banks of a beautifull creek (fringed with
fine timber larger than any we have seen on our journey,) the
water of which was delightfully cool and fresh from the
snow covered peak of Laramie whose Base it waters. At this
place another train came up with us and crossing the creek
campd on the opposite bank. Found very good grass here.
There is also a beautifull spring of delightful water here
calld Hebers spring and distant 42 miles from Fort Laramie.

Sunday [June] 3d Nothing worthy of remark occurrd
during this day. Our road lay over very steep Hills which
increased in magnitude the farther we proceeded and the
descent from them into the valleys was difficult and dan-
gerous. After crossing some 4 or 5 dry creeks we came to
La Bonte Creek a very pretty mountain stream, about 4
O clock. We crossd this stream and proceeding 4 or 5 miles
farther we campd upon a small branch of the same where we
found Col Russells Company mending one of their wagons.
The weather during the day was delightfull but the nights
here are always cold.
Monday [June] 4th Left Camp at 6 The road was very dry and the wind blew fresh covering us with dust. The Hills here and the valleys also are composed of red clay and the country looks as if it had at some former period been subjected to the action of volcanic fires. In some places large peaks of volcanic rocks are protruded to a great height through the surface of the valleys, and the country looks barren and dreary in the extreme. The road however with the exception of steep Hills and deep ravines is excellent and where it is level our teams could draw 5 times their load. About 3 o clock we came again in sight of the Platte, after crossing several small rivulets and one very pretty little creek called La Prele. We then began to descend from the Hills and at 5 we campd on the Banks of the Fousche Bois or Box Elder Creek, 4 miles from the Platte River. One of our party shot a Buffalo this day and quite a number have been seen. This country is very full of game, Deer, Elk and Buffalo.

Tuesday [June] 5th Upon examining my waggon this morning I found one of my axletrees sprung and the lower skein broken—the effect of coming down steep Hills with locked wheels. I have an extra axletree however and when it gives way entirely can easily put a new one in its place. Left camp at 7 and at ½ past 10 arrived at Deer Creek a very pretty stream emptying into the Platte river 4 or 5 miles above the point at which we struck it this morning. Here we remained some time as there was plenty of good grass and after dinner we went a fishing with a small net in the creek and succeeded in catching some fine fish. In the afternoon we started again just as a very Black cloud was rising in the west and shortly after it commenced raining and continued during the day and part of the night. Campd early near the river, good water and wood, poor grass.

Wednesday [June] 6. Started about 6 and after travelling 3 miles we were brought to a full stop by a small creek in places not more than 12 feet wide but nearly 10 feet deep. After searching some time for a ford we found one near its mouth where it emptied into the river. Here we crossed it and after travelling till 3 o clock we arrived at the Upper Platte ferry kept by some “Mormons” who this year will make a little fortune should the river keep high. Here we found some 60 waggons waiting their turn to cross and as
there was no possible chance to ford the river we were obliged to camp and wait for our turn also. The ferry Boat is 3 canoes secured together—the Stream is very rapid and 100 yards wide and at this time is rising rapidly. The Mormons besides their Ferry have a Blacksmith shop here and are well patronised this season at high rates—Ferriage for a waggon $5.00—the mules have to swim. The nights are cool and disagreeable and the Bluffs skirting the valley have large snow Banks on their summits. We have rain too nearly every day occasionally varied with Hail. The country is arid sandy and barren grass is very poor and nothing appears to grow to advantage but weeds and wild sage with which the plains abound and which is used for fuel when wood is scarce. The mountains are dotted here and there with scattering pine trees and the whole country has a singularly wild and desert like appearance.

Thursday [June] 7th. Busied ourselves in making preparations for crossing the river and about 1. o'clock we swam our mules over, but we were unable to cross all our waggons on account of a tremendous hail Storm which lasted an hour detained the Ferry, and came near “stampeding” all our mules. At night we had 7 waggons across the river and we would have worked un till all were over but it became Cloudy and the wind blew fresh so we could not work to advantage. Rained hard in the night.

Friday [June] 8. We got the remainder of our waggon s over at 8 this morning and driving up our mules we left the ferry with some 60 dollars less in our pockets than when we arrived. Six miles above the Ferry is the place where the river is generally forded when the water is low. At this point we left the river and striking over the Hills laid our course for the Sweet Water River over a most wretched country sandy barren and un productive, the surface of the earth covered in spots with saline crusts and mineral efflorescences and the water scarcely drinkable, tasting like weak ley [lye], and in some places absolutely poisonous making men and animals sick who drink of it. We campd at night in a little valley we had the good fortune to find where there was fine grass and tolerable water but no fuel except the wood of the wild sage plant. The night was cold and wintry and very uncomfortable for all.
Saturday [June] 9th We passd this day over a succession of Hills and valleys of very barren appearance by a crooked winding road which wound around the ranges of naked rocks and mountains with which the country was as it were hedged in. The Soil was principally a gravelly Sand occasionally varied with a cement-like Clay and is productive of nothing but the wild sage plant the woody roots of which we use for fuel. There is no timber to be found except some stunted pines which occasionally grow in the crevices of the rocky Bluffs and the whole prospect was cheerless and desolate. On reaching camp this evening I made preparations to put in my new axletree the old one being so much shattered that I was afraid to trust it any longer. Several friends kindly lent their assistance and I soon had affairs in proper train for a sound waggon in the morning.

Sunday [June] 10th As I did not succeed in finishing my waggon over night I was obliged to remain behind this morning and was detained an hour and a half. Several of the company remained with me to assist me in my work and to serve as a guard. When my waggon was complete the train was still in sight about 5 miles ahead and driving up pretty smartly I gained rapidly upon them. Our road lay across a level plain of light sand, in spots coverd with a salty alkaline crust and our wheels sank from 4 to 6 inches. Passed several places where the ground was completely coverd with Carbonate of Soda or Saleratus which will answer all the purposes of the article sold in the States. About 11 o clock we came in sight of the Sweet Water River and ½ an hour after we came up with our train which was nooning at the foot of Independence Rock (a famous landmark and also a great curiosity[)]. It rises by itself in the centre of the plain and is the first of a series of mountains composed of perfectly naked rock called the Rattlesnake mountains. It acquired its name from a party of Oregon emigrants who celebrated the 4th of July at that place and is literally coverd with the names of persons painted on its sides to a great height above the ground. After dinner we got under weigh again and crossing the River ½ a mile above the rock we began to ascend the valley which forms the avenue by which we attain the

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22 This lone mass of granite is 1,550 yards in circumference and at its highest point rises 193 feet above the plain. Archer B. Hulbert, *Forty-niners: The Chronicle of the California Trail* (Boston, 1931), 148n.
celebrated South Pass in the Rocky Mountains. After travelling 6 or 7 miles we passed the celebrated "Devils Gate" a place where the river forces its way through perpendicular rocks 400 feet high. It is situated a little off the road and is a great curiosity. The country around with the exception of an occasional strip of fertile land on the Banks of the river still continues barren and unproductive. The valley is 4 or 5 miles wide and is skirted on each side by mountains which on the north side are naked rock with an occasional stunted pine Bush growing in their clefts, while on the other they are composed of a sterile sandy clay and crumblly rock, destitute of timber and their tops covered with snow. The whole country is perfectly valueless for agricultural purposes and with the exception of some poor grass (very scanty in quantity) wild sage and Grease Wood are its only products. The road too is heavy & sandy and our teams labor hard.

Campd at 5 on the Banks of the Sweet water which by the bye well deserves its name being cold pure and delightful and fed by the eternal snows of the mountains among which it rises. We made this day 25 miles, a pretty good journey considering the state of the roads.

Monday [June] 11th Nothing worthy of remark occurred this day until noon when we came up with Col Russels train which crossed the Platte River the day before us. They were laying by, resting their animals and mending their waggons which had suffered a little on the journey. Found the road rather better than on the preceding day and campd at night on the Bank of the river near the foot of a mountain making about 23 miles. We have a Mormon Guide Book with us which describes the road minutely and gives the distances from one camp to another and we are thus able to regulate our drives so as to secure good grass for our animals which are improving every day.25

Tuesday [June] 12th Started this morning before Breakfast and travelled 9 miles to a spot where our guide Book assured us we should find grass of an excellent quality of which we wished to take advantage as the grass was poor

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at our camp. Here we remained 3 hours when we started again being obliged to make 16 miles in order to find a good camp wood and water. Passd near the road an alkaline spring and lake the ground in the vicinity of which was covered with saleratus—our road lay over some very sandy Hills at a distance from the River and it was late in the afternoon when we reached our camp. During this day we had our first view of the "Wind River Mountains" and "Fremonts Peak," coverd with Snow and looking like white clouds in the distance. The night was very cold and ice froze as thick as a dollar in our Buckets reminding us of our proximity to the great dividing ridge of the continent. Col Russells train came up with us this evening having travelld (in order to overtake us) upwards of 40 miles during the day. We are now 40 miles from the South Pass.

Wednesday [June] 13th Left camp at 1½ past 6 and crossing the Sweet water took our way over some long Hills to the westward. The valley of the River is here quite contracted and the Hills approach close together About 10 o clock we left the valley by an abrupt turn to the right and began to ascend the mountains by some very steep and difficult roads. The steep Hills and rocky ridges nearly shook our waggons to pieces and we passd several ravines where the snow still lay several feet in depth. Campd at night in a beautifull little ravine completely enclosed by surrounding Hills, a fine stream of snow water running through it, taking its rise from a large snow Bank on the shady side of the hills at least 12 feet deep. The night was very cold and ice froze ½ an inch thick in our Bucket.

Thursday [June] 14th. Left camp at our usual time and after travelling some 7 or 8 miles we came (after crossing several small branches) again on our old friend the Sweet water for the last time. Here we remained several hours to allow our mules to feed the grass having been poor at our former camp. There was a company of Traders campd here some of whom as they told us have lived in mountains 26 years. They are principally Frenchmen. While we remained here Col Russells Company overtook us and several more waggons came in sight. The little valley soon presented a
lively appearance there probably being more wagons and people collected there than ever was witnessed before. We have been surprised at not meeting Indians on our route as we have not seen one since we left the south fork of the Platte River but the traders have solved the mystery. They told us that knowing there would be a large emigration from the states this season they spread a report among the Indians that the white people were running away from the Small Pox which they affirmed was raging in the states, and as this is the disease most dreaded by the Indians (the knowledge of which they first obtained by coming in contact with the white man) they have all left the country bordering on the great California trail, their fears of this dread malady overcoming their innate love of plunder. This is fortunate for us as we are glad to dispense with their company. Left the Sweetwater about 1 o'clock and travelling a few miles we reached the valley intersecting the mountains which is known by the name of the South Pass,\textsuperscript{24} ascending this we reached the summit about 1½ past 4 and continued about 3 miles on the other side when we camped near a fine spring of water called the Pacific Spring (from its being the first water on the Pacific slope) from which a little rivulet runs which communicates (by means of the Sandy and Green or Colorado River as it is called further down) with the waters of the Pacific Ocean. Here between 7 and 8 thousand feet above the level of the sea with immense mountains rising still higher on each side of us their summits clothed with eternal snow we spent a very pleasant night after the fatiguing journey of the day. The air is delightfully pure though always cold after nightfall in these mountain regions and although ice froze \(\frac{1}{4}\) of an inch thick in our Buckets still we experienced very little inconvenience from the coldness of the weather. My partner Mr Mercure was taken suddenly ill this night but what his complaint is I am unable to discover.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} South Pass marks the continental divide but actually has little resemblance to a pass. This fortuitous gateway in the Rockies is about twenty miles wide with an undulating surface occasionally mounting into hills. So gradual is the ascent that in driving West the editors would have gone through the pass unawares had it not been for an inconspicuous historical marker located some distance from the side of the road.

\textsuperscript{25} Since the travelers were now in "high country," Mercure may have been a victim of the debilitating "mountain fever."
Friday [June] 15. Mr Mercure this morning was so unwell as to be unable to render me any assistance and I had to catch up and harness my team alone. This business requires great expedition and consequently I was left somewhat in the rear of the train. I succeeded however in overtaking it after 2 hours driving at the Banks of a small branch or water course where they were watering the mules. The water at this place was strongly charged with alkali and the ground white in spots with carbonate of soda. After driving a few miles farther we nooned at a spot of excellent grass which we were fortunate enough to find where our teams had a luxurious repast and filled themselves in a short time. After dinner we drove on very rapidly and in about 2 hours arrived at the junction of the California and Oregon roads 19 miles from Pacific Spring. Here 2 waggons left our train, having determined to go the southern route by the way of Salt Lake. Our party however determined to go the old route by the way of Greenwoods Cut-off, which though objectionable in some respects is some 70 miles shorter. About 4 miles from the junction we crossed a small stream called the Dry Sandy and camped on the opposite Bank. Here we remained until 6 when we harnessed up again and proceeded on to another creek called the Big Sandy—distance some 10 miles, where we arrived at 10. The night was quite dark and cold but the road was good and no Hills on the route. Our object in travelling after night was to allow our teams to rest and fill themselves the next day until 3 PM when we expected to start and drive all night until we reached Green River it being represented to us that for that distance (35 miles) we should find no water. We had a slight shower accompanied by a high wind soon after we arrived at camp and our tents and wagon covers were scattered in all directions.

Saturday [June] 16th. Remained in camp this day until 3 o'clock at which time we harnessed up and started on our long stretch of 35 miles which we expected to make by 6 the next morning. The road after leaving the river was very level for a long distance and as far as we could see appeared to continue so until our view was bounded by a lofty range of

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26 Greenwood's Cutoff, “Dry Drive,” or as it was more commonly identified, Sublette’s Cutoff, was designed to eliminate the wide detour caused by going south to Fort Bridger. Those who wished to go south to Salt Lake City did not use this cutoff utilized by the Argonauts of ‘49.
mountains covered with Snow. The country was the most barren of any we had yet seen producing nothing but wild sage and weeds and in some places perfectly destitute of any thing in the shape of vegetation. The soil appeared to be a hard gravelly clay and the road, owing to dry weather and the passage of so many teams was dusty in the extreme and was rendered almost insupportable by the prevalence of an extremely high wind which blew the dust in clouds and almost suffocated us. The sky was cloudy and threatened rain and as evening approached became quite dark. We drove on till 9 the country becoming more broken and hilly, we passed down several long Hills not very steep until at last we found ourselves on the brink of a ravine the descent of which was perfectly frightful. The night was so dark we could not see the road in all its horrors but double locking our wheels we trusted ourselves to our mules and fortune, and began the dangerous descent, which we all succeeded in effecting in safety. On getting to the Bottom our company thought best to give over the prosecution of our journey until daylight and we accordingly turned out our mules and remained till 4 in the morning. At this time we got under weigh again and passing over a succession of ravines and long tracts of table land on which we found excellent grass but which we were unable to give our mules the benefit of we about 9 o clock caught the first view of Green River at the distance of 7 miles. Our descent to the valley of the river from this distance was really terrible and it will always astonish me that it was effected in safety by such a number of waggons, not an accident occurring though in many places the Hills we had to descend were almost perpendicular and at other places the road wound along on high ridges with deep ravines on each side, hundreds of feet deep, the tops of the ridges being barely wide enough for 2 waggons to pass abreast. Our mules appeared to feel the danger of our position and behaved admirably as they generally do in all mountainous countries acting with great prudence and circumspection and displaying their sureness of foot in a remarkable degree. They were suffering too for water not having had any since we left the Sandy River, and as the morning was warm and the road dusty they were almost suffocated with thirst which their exercise during a drive of full 40 miles increased in a great degree. We did not reach the river valley until 1.
o'clock when we soon relieved our mules of their harness and gave them water and grass, though of this latter there was but a poor supply, the land being destitute of almost every thing except weeds. A mule however can live on almost any thing and they were soon busy cropping the stunted herbage and contenting themselves with “Dog” instead of “Beef” this time. This valley is very beautifull and presents by far the most charming specimen of mountain scenery I have met with on my journey. The Hills we found so difficult to descend when viewed from the valley are beautifull in the extreme. They are regular in their formation and combined with the green valley which they enclose, with its rapid and beautifull river, with its Islands covered with timber, the clayey Hills on the opposite side and the snow capp'd summits of the lofty mountains seen in the distance, form a scene which is beautifull as a picture. The River here is too deep to ford but there is a Ferry kept by a Frenchman by the name of ["Wokie"] who crosses waggons at $2. apiece. There were 50 or 60 teams ahead of us when we arrived so we shall be detained a day or more before we can get our turn. This delay we can well afford as our teams require rest.

Monday [June] 18th. As usual in this mountainous country, the morning was very cold and during the day frequent showers of chilly rain and sometimes Hail made the weather disagreeable though at intervals the sun would shine out with great warmth. The business of ferrying the waggons over proceeds but slowly and there is no telling when we shall get away from this place

Tuesday [June] 19. The waggons ahead of us having mostly been ferried over we commenced crossing the river about 8. o'clock and by using extra exertions our teams were all across by eleven. We remained on the bank of the river untill we got our dinners and untill some 2 or 3 trades for Horses and Mules could be brought to a successful conclusion when we harnessd up and left the valley of the Green River. The mountains before us looked almost inaccessible but we found a tolerable road through the defiles between them and after ascending and descending some steep Hills we found ourselves in the valley of a small stream, tributary to the Green River 6 miles from the Ferry. Up this stream we
travelld some 4 miles when night coming on we campd on its Banks having first crossed it. The country still presents the same sterile appearance and good grass is scarcely to be found.

Wednesday [June] 20. Nothing worthy of remark occur'd during the day except our passage over some very rough country which began gradually to assume a better appearance as regards fertility and we found some very good grass on the Hills. Towards night we came upon another stream the water of which was so high that we were obliged to raise our waggon beds 6 inches in order to cross it. In descending to the valley of this stream we came down a very steep Hill almost equal to the one described before, but they have been so common during this part of our journey that we scarcely notice them. We campd in the valley of this stream which is call'd (as we were told) "Hams Fork" and is a tributary of Bear River although its waters appeared to me to run the wrong way.

Thursday [June] 21. Left Hams Fork at 6 and ascending the Hills on its west Bank we proceeded on our journey. The country as we proceeded began to assume a still better appearance and occasionally small patches of timber were found on the mountain sides. Fine springs of delicious water were common on the road—which kept constantly ascending untill as it appeared to me we attained an elevation much greater than any we had reached before. On the top of the mountains we found large level spaces of fertile land & abounding in grass and water the latter in some places so plentiful as to render the soil swampy. Just before we attained our greatest elevation we passd through a copse of beautifull fir trees almost the first we had seen in the mountains. We soon after arrived at the summit and we had a most magnificent view of mountain scenery but our attention was speedily called from the contemplation of it to the stupendous Hill we were obliged to descend over a mile long and in some places so steep that our mules would be obliged to slide down. We commenced descending with double locked wheels and it was with the utmost difficulty we could prevent the waggons from running over the mules. About ½ way down we were brought to a full stop by a cliff of rocks which extended
across the defile down which we were passing, the descent over which for 30 feet was nearly perpendicular. Here we were obliged to take off our mules and lower our waggons over the precipice with ropes some 30 men holding back at a time. We succeeded in this without any accident and after a long and very carefull drive we arrived at the bottom of the Hill in safety. Finding fine grass and a beautiful rivulet in the valley we turned out our mules and got our dinner. I found some fine onions growing near the banks of the stream of which I made a fine salad which I would not have exchanged for any dish in the world. Having so much salt meat to eat we all have a great craving for vegetable food and I would freely give a dollar for $\frac{1}{2}$ a dozen potatoes. After dinner we in company with another train (which we found in the valley) commenced ascending another Hill, a fit rival to the one we had just descended. On arriving at the top we found we were immediately to descend again and we found this to be the steepest Hill we had yet encountered. We had to keep ropes attached to our waggons $\frac{3}{4}$ths of the way down and it required the aid of 20 men to each waggon to prevent them from overpowering the teams. On arriving at the bottom we found we were in the valley of another tributary of Bear River called Smiths Fork. We were detained so long by the last Hill that we did not proceed far but campd very soon after striking the valley.

Friday [June] 22. Our course lay this morning up the valley of Smiths Fork and about 9 o clock we were obliged to cross it near where it entered the valley through a pass in the mountains. A few miles farther on we came upon the Bear River having passed the junction of our road with the old Oregon trail before crossing Smiths Fork. The road down this valley is excellent and the grass also. While we were nooning a party of Indians came to our camp and informed us that "Thomas’s Fork," a tributary of Bear River which we had to cross was bank full and the water as high as the tops of our waggons. These are the first Indians except a few at Green River and the "Sioux" of the Nebraska that we have yet seen notwithstanding the reports of such numbers of them being on the road waiting for plunder. We nooned within sight of Thomas Fork and could see on the opposite side some 30 waggons which had succeeded in crossing and were nooning on the Banks. After dinner we drove
about 7 miles around a large portion of swampy land which lies at the junction of the "Fork" with the River and as the Indians told us we found the Stream quite high. We blocked up our waggon Beds however and soon got across without much difficulty. We then commenced ascending the Hills bordering on the River and forming the dividing ridge between the Fork and the main Stream. After crossing 1 Hill we descended into a small valley through which ran a small rivulet and here we saw the finest display of natural grass that we have met with on our journey. The grass was over 1 foot high free from weeds and full of seed nearly formed—and resembled a well cultivated mowing ground—growing even to the summits of the Hills on either side of the valley. Leaving this valley we ascended a very steep Hill and after crossing its summit descended again to the Bear River valley by a Hill equally steep and dangerous, from the number of Stones in the road. We did not arrive in the valley until after Sun down after a long drive of over 30 miles. This night we had no frost or ice though there is plenty of snow still to be seen on the adjacent mountains.

Saturday [June] 23. Our course this day lay down the valley over a level and beautiful road on which at the time a great many waggons besides our own were travelling. We crossed several rivulets emptying into Bear River and passed the large train "23 Ox waggons[" during the day. Late in the afternoon in crossing a small rivulet with muddy banks, one of our waggons broke an axletree and we accordingly campd, in order to repair it. Night chilly and cold.

Sunday [June] 24. Nothing worthy of remark occurred during this morning. We started early and made a rapid drive of over 15 miles before dinner. We passed large quantities of Lava rock near the road which furnisht evidence that this region has at some period been subject to volcanic action. The land of this valley is generally fertile and we found most excellent grass. It would make a superior wheat country and no doubt produce excellent crops. Shortly after we had nooned we came upon the celebrated Soda Springs near the banks of the River. There are several of them in close proximity to each other, each differing a little in their taste owing to the different quantities of gas passing through their water.
One of them is called the Cider spring from the slightly acid taste the water possesses. A short distance below we came to the Steam Boat Spring, which is a great curiosity. It is situated near the margin of the river and issues from a flat brownish rock through several apertures from the largest of which the slightly heated water is thrown up to the height of 18 inches at regular intervals like the steam escaping from the pipe of a high pressure Steam Boat. In several of the other apertures the water presents the appearance as if boiling and as it rushes from the rock is accompanied with a hissing noise. The Rock itself is sufficiently hot to feel warm to the feet the moment you tread on it, through the soles of the Shoes. The Mountains in the vicinity and for miles below abound in evidence of volcanic action and on the opposite side of the River as I am told there is an Old Crater from which no doubt much of the volcanic signs have issued. Shortly after leaving the spring it commenced raining and continued to do so for about 3 hours. At the end of this time we made an abrupt turn to the right along the foot of a range of Bluffs and after travelling 5 miles we camped within sight of a large train just ahead of us. We passed on the road several remarkable fissures in the volcanic rock which appeared to be without bottom, and also a remarkable Spring with a river all round it like the Edge of a Bowl.

Monday [June] 25  Started some time before the other train and continued up the valley, (having left the Bear River valley when we took the abrupt turn the evening previous)—the country retaining the same characteristics and volcanic rock still quite troublesome in the road. About noon we arrived at the Forks of a small stream where we turned out to graze and remained some time. We supposed this stream to be the Port Neuf which rises in the range of mountains on our left and empties its waters into the Snake River or Lewis Fork of the Columbia. We found a number of Indians here and our company succeeded in purchasing several mules and ponies from them. After dinner we crossed the River and began to ascend the dividing ridge between the waters of the Great Basin and Pacific Ocean. Our road was very rough—Hilly, Rocky and Swampy by turns and by night we found all of our teams nearly tired out. One of our teams stalled in a swamp just after leaving the summit of the
mountain and detained us so long that we did not reach camp till dusk. We camped near a splendid spring of water which gushed from the side of the mountain in a volume sufficient to turn a Grist Mill. Night cold and chilly.

Tuesday [June] 26. Continued our journey and after descending the mountains we followed for some time, the course of a small stream a tributary I believe of the Port Neuf, and campd near it at noon. After dinner we left this stream and struck across a broad and level plain coverd with wild Sage and nothing else. The Soil which at first was clay soon turned to sand and as the day was intensely hot our mules suffered very much from the heavy drawing. Towards night we campd on a piece of swampy land (after crossing several sloughs) where we found very good grass, but we were nearly eaten up by the mosquitoes which abounded in the vicinity and whose bites were the most poisonous and painful to me of any I had ever met with. This was a very tiresome days drive.

Wednesday [June] 27. Continued our journey and after crossing several sloughs and a small stream the water of which we found quite high we arrived about 9 o clock at Fort Hall27 This celebrated trading post is an edifice similar in construction to Fort Laramie though not quite so large, built of “adobes” or sun dried Bricks and is situated on the Banks of Lewis's Fork. We remained here 2 hours and we procured Fresh Beef, Milk, Cheese and other luxuries so grateful to those who have been deprived of them for a length of time. At the expiration of that time we left the Fort and proceeded on our journey. After crossing several sloughs and much swampy ground we reached the Port Neuf River the water of which being high we were obliged to block up our waggon Beds before we could cross it. At this place near its mouth the river is some 40 yards wide and 4 feet deep. After crossing we ascended a very steep hill to the upland in order to avoid the swampy ground which lies about the river for a great

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27 Fort Hall had been established in 1834 to serve as a forward station for the fur trade. Originally the outpost was about nine miles north of the Portneuf River on the east bank of the Snake River. This vital station on the main trail west was owned and operated by the British-Canadian Hudson Bay Company from 1837 to 1856. Richard G. Beidleman, “Nathaniel Wyeth’s Fort Hall,” Oregon Historical Quarterly, LVIII (September, 1957), 197-250.
many miles. Our course lay parallell with Lewis Fork the road following the river for some distance. We had a very unpleasant days journey owing to the road being grown up with wild Sage the woody roots of which obstructed our way and shook our waggons about dreadfully and also to the great quantities of dust which rose in clouds around us. About 3 o clock in the afternoon we crossd the "Panac" a small stream or rivulet rather and after a long and hard days drive for both mules and men we campd late in the evening with 2 other trains with which we had caught up.

Thursday [June] 28 Left Camp at our usual hour but not before the 2 trains (who were anxious to keep ahead of us) had started. Our course as on the preceding day lay along the banks of the River and our road as regards dust was but little better than before. About 10. o'clock we arrived at the falls of the Snake River calld the American Falls which presented us with a magnificent spectacle and which I would try to describe if description was my forte. The scenery near the Falls is very picturesque and pleasing and continues with some exceptions to be so for some distance. There are numerous rapids in the river besides the Falls, & the rocky shores assume some very unusual forms which to the admirer of natures handiwork renders this part of the road peculiarly interesting. At Evening we arrived at Fall River so called from the numerous cascades with which it is embellished near its mouth, and crossing it we campd on the opposite Bank. The grass was very poor and our teams suffered in consequence having for the last few days been worked unusually hard.

Friday [June] 29. This morning after the first few hours drive, we ascended the Hills, leaving Lewis Fork, and at length we entered into a long and narrow valley which descended to the Banks of Raft River. We followed the course of this River the entire day crossd its channel 3 times and camped on its banks at night, nothing material occurring except that we found plenty of dust and scarcity of grass. One of my mules was taken Sick this day owing to its having eaten some poisonous plant or drank some of the poisonous water so common in this country. We have lost several animals from this cause already.
Saturday [June] 30. My mule was so ill this morning that I was unable to drive him in the team. I succeeded however in procuring one from a friend to work in his place and was enabled thus to continue my journey. We followed Raft River this day to its head and crossed the dividing Ridge which separates the Waters of the Pacific from the Great Basin. Among the Hills at the head of Raft River we found excellent grass, Red top and Bunch grass, and it continued good to our camp. My mule was very ill this evening and in common with the others was very much afflicted with a sort of gnat which has made its first appearance this day. It fastens in the hide of a mule like a wood tick and when it is brushed off the head is generally left behind. When it lets go voluntarily large drops of blood mark the spot it left. I do not know what they are called but I never saw any thing of the kind before.

Sunday July 1st. My mule being worse than ever this morning, and my friend not being able to oblige me with his mule I applied to Col Jarrot in order to hire one, he having several extra ones but I met with a very abrupt refusal and upon going the rounds of the camp I found I could not procure a single mule for love or money. When the usual time for starting arrived my Waggon was thus compell'd to remain behind. I discovered also that one of my axletrees was slightly sprung and as I was refused the only one in the company when the train started I accompanied it on foot for a few miles, as I had heard the evening before that a waggon belonging to one of the trains ahead had been broken in passing through a very rocky defile between 2 mountains, which it was the intention of the owners to abandon, and I thought I might possibly stand a chance of supplying myself there, as several trains had camp'd there the previous evening. On arriving at the defile however I found the owners of the broken waggon engaged in constructing a cart of the hind wheels and as the other axletree was broken I was disappointed in my hopes. I succeeded however in purchasing (from an ox train ahead) a mule which had been sick but was recovering, for $30.00 and with my prize I returned to camp. As I was returning I again requested Col Jarrot to let me have his extra axletree but meeting again with a refusal, I took my leave of him much vexed with his mean
Conduct and shamefull desertion, of a member of his company in his hour of need. On arriving at camp I found "Mercure" my partner busily employed preparing his fire arms in order to be prepared for any emergency should Indians visit us in our unprotected situation. My mules were quietly feeding around the waggon and with the exception of the one that was sick luxuriating in the felicity of a days rest, a unusual occurrence to them. We began immediately to rearrange our load (in order to lighten it as much as possible) and cook our dinner. Just before our dinner was ready a horseman arrived at our camp who had been in search of a horse lost by one of the trains ahead of us. He informed me there would be a train of 20 Ox wagons with us at our camp at night he having left them a days journey behind and that I would then have plenty of company. He remained and took dinner with us and shortly after left. As I was anxious to pass the rocky gorge in the mountain and know the fate of my axletree at once after dinner I commenced harnessing my mules. My sick mule observing this neighed several times and came voluntarily to the waggon as if to take his customary place but was in such pain that it could scarcely stand. He lay down and rose again several times at last he began to groan and struggle and was evidently in his death agony. He continued in this state for 1/2 an hour and then died the blood gushing from his nose and mouth. As we now knew the worst we immediately left camp and proceeded about 4 miles to the rocky gorge mentiond before which we succeeded in passing without accident and we camp'd just beyond it. Discovering that we had left our axe at our former camp I proceeded on foot to recover it. I reached the camp about sundown found my axe & to my great joy could discover the smoke from the fires of the ox train the horseman told us of, ascending the sides of the mountain about 2 miles distant. Their presence so near me served to make me feel more secure and I returned to my waggon with a light heart. It rained and hailed very hard during the night and the lightning fairly blinded us with its dazzling brilliancy.

Monday [July] 2 About 8 o clock the Ox train came along and we harnessed our mules and joined them they manifesting every disposition to oblige and assist us and offering to extend us their aid whenever it should be required. We
passed by a very fine road, through several narrow passes in the mountains—which were different from any we had seen before, the most of them consisting of naked rock piled up in every imaginable form and descending into a valley we turned out to noon by the side of a pretty little rivulet. About 3 miles before us was another train which had just arrived from the Salt lake. We had passed the junction of the Salt lake road with the California road early in the day. In the afternoon we passed over some very steep Hills and we camped at night on the head waters of Muddy Creek a tributary of Snake River. The weather was intensely cold during the night and ice froze 1/4th of an inch thick in our Bucket.

Tuesday [July] 3d This morning after passing over some steep and rocky Hills we descended into the valley of Goose Creek and continued in it all day. just before sundown we came upon a place where the stream issues from a Rocky gorge between 2 mountains and through which the road runs, which was almost as difficult to pass as the rocky defile we encountered 2 days before. We all succeeded in getting through in safety which was more than those who were before us could say, the fragments of 2 waggons testifying to the danger of the road and their loss at the same time. When about midway through this pass we camped in a spot where the mountains receded from each other leaving a pretty little valley covered with tolerable grass between them. The stream furnished us with water and the scattering white Cedar Bushes on the mountain side gave us fuel which last we needed very much as the night was nearly as cold as the preceding one and one found plenty of ice in the morning.

Wednesday [July] 4th We made an early start this morning purposing to drive till 2 PM and then to lay by for the rest of the day in order to celebrate the anniversary of our Independence. We were disappointed however in our intentions for the country over which we had to pass was sterile in the extreme and we could find no grass or water for our cattle. The Hills we passed in the morning were covered with volcanic rock which lay so thick in the road that our waggons were in danger of being broken every instant—indeed we passed the fragments of one, broken on the day previous—and as for pasturage there was nothing
except the eternal wild Sage which usurps the place of every thing else and will scarcely suffer any thing to grow besides itself. We found a small spring about 1 o'clock and we turned out to noon, but as the grass was so scarce we continued our journey in the afternoon purposing to stop at the first tolerable grass and water we should find. We travelld in search of this till near night and barely succeeded in finding then some stagnant water in the bottom of a dry Water Course by the road side and grass of that miserable quality which grows on land impregnated with alkali and which is rather hurtfull than nutritious to animals. Not being able to help ourselves we were obliged to camp here hoping for better luck next time.

Thursday [July] 5. This whole day was spent in passing up a valley of that alkaline description of soil mentioned above. We experienced a scarcity of water and as usual poor grass and as the weather appeared to have been dry here for a long time the roads were horribly dusty and we were nearly suffocated. We reached the termination of the valley near sundown and here we found a spring of deligntfull water at the foot of the mountains and tolerable grass also We campd at the mouth of a pass between [sic] the mountains through which the road runs and by the side of a little rivulet which runs from the Spring

Friday [July] 6th  This morning we proceeded up the pass and over a mountain ridge into a valley of very sterile soil at the farthest extremity of which were some lofty mountains covered with snow, which had been in sight for 2 days. We found a small rivulet in this valley which we thought might probably be a portion of the head waters of Marys River but we were dissappointed in our conjectures as after following it for some time it eventually became lost in a swamp at the foot of the mountains we had seen in the distance. At the base of these mountains the road turned abruptly to the right and passd into another valley different in appearance from the last being more fertile and though in spots the saleratus covered the [this?] ground with its white crust still appearances were quite favorable for a good camp  We found a splendid spring in the centre of the valley and as the grass was tolerable we campd near it Quite a misfortune here
befell the company with whom I was journeying. They lost 3 oxen and 1 cow which died in 3 hours from the time of Camping from the effects of some poison vegetable which they had unfortunately eaten. The company were accordingly obliged to herd their cattle all night and not allow them to feed lest they should lose more of them. They discovered next morning the cause of their misfortune in some Water Hemlock which grew by the small rivulet which ran from the spring.

Saturday [July] 7. The Ox train made an early start this morning in order to find a less dangerous neighborhood for their cattle to feed in, leaving me behind as I decided to get my Breakfast before leaving camp. I caught up with them again about 9 o'clock and taking the lead we travelld together down the margin of the little stream which constantly increasing in size gave promise (which it eventually fullfilled) of being a tributary of St Mary River. The banks of the stream were overspread with fine grass and we found no difficulty in selecting a beautifull spot to noon at. Soon after dinner we arrived at a spot where the road taking an abrupt turn round the point of a ridge of land running into the valley led directly to the first crossing of the long looked for Marys River. We soon arrived at the ford and though the water was quite high we had but little difficulty in crossing our waggons—after crossing the River we drove 10 miles and campd at a beautifull spot where the grass stood knee high

Sunday [July] 8th Continued our journey down the river this morning for about 12 miles when we reached a point where the valley contracts and the river takes its course through a narrow pass or caion in the mountains As we found good grass here and as one of the companys men was so sick as to render him unable to travel the Captain decided to abide here during the remainder of the day, a decision with which I was not very sorry to comply as I believed a days

28 According to trapper folklore, Mary's River (Humboldt River) was named for the Indian wife of Peter Skene Ogden, of the Hudson Bay Company, who probably discovered the river in 1825. Oscar Osburn Winther (ed.), "From Tennessee to California in 1849: Letters of the Reve Family ...", Journal of the Rutgers University Library, XI (June, 1948), 46. Although Frémont bestowed the present name of Humboldt on the stream, it retained the identification of "Mary's River" for a number of years.
rest would be very beneficial to my animals particularly to the one last purchased, which had been pretty well worked down previous to my getting him—a few moments after however I was made aware of the intention [of] some 6 or 7 wagons to separate themselves from the train and go ahead 1/2 a days journey and as the Blacksmith of the company was to go with them and I was anxious to get my mules shod I was induced to accompany them. Accordingly about 1/2 past 2 we started and after crossing a small tributary of the River we ascended the Hills in order to avoid a cañon through which the River passes. After we had again descended to the valley we continued our journey 8 miles and campd at a place where we found the remains of a wagon which had been left on the road.

Monday [July] 9 Nothing occurred worthy of remark untill the afternoon when we were again forced to take to the Hills in order to avoid crossing the River which was bank full at the time and 8 feet deep. We crossed the mountain by a road that was a perfect curiosity and went winding about through the defiles like a perfect labyrinth, we not being able to see 20 yards before us at any time. After reaching the summit of the mountain we descended by a very gradual declination to a valley which opened on the river and campd immediately on our arrival as the sun had been down some time before we left the mountain.

Tuesday [July] 10th After travelling 6 or 7 miles this morning we were again obliged to ascend the mountain to avoid a cañon. This road too was quite a curiosity but solely on account of its being so very bad, the latter part of it in particular (before again reaching the river) being very rocky, causing me to fear for my axletrees every moment. The distance across the mountain was 16 miles of which I was not aware untill I had commenced the crossing and as there was no grass and but little water on the road I drove my team through without nooning. Arrived at the river again at 1/2 past 3, and was obliged to camp in a most miserable place there being nothing but weeds and coarse grass for the mules to eat and but little of that. The road took to the Hills again within 3/4 of a mile and I had no other resource but to content myself as well as I could.
Wednesday [July] 11th About 7 o clock we again ascended the mountain anticipating another hard drive but in this we were disappointed as after we reached the summit of the Hill we descended by an easy Pass to the valley again. We travelld about 9 miles through a very miserable country and finding at last some green grass near the river we determined to stop and allow our animals to feed. The Country we are now passing through is the most valueless and desert like of any we have met with and it seems to me that in some violent convulsion of nature the crust of the Earth has been burst asunder and thrown up in the form of rocky sterile mountains composed of Lava and Clay in alternate proportions and in every variety of shape and size while at the same time floods of mud and ashes have been vomited forth from the bowels of the Earth which has subsided to the foot of the mountains and formed the valley in which we are now travelling. The Soil is the most arid sterile and unproductive of any I have yet seen. Nothing in the shape of vegetation can be found except Wild Sage and Grease Wood—except on the margin of the stream where a coarse wild grass is occasionally found which furnishes the only food for our animals and this is rapidly drying up under the influence of a blistering sun—and as at this season of the year it never rains in this Country I cannot help fearing that those who come after us will experience great distress and suffering and perhaps lose their lives in this desert valley. As near as we can judge there are about 110 teams ahead of us at present and their transit over the valley has been very much like the descent of the locusts in Egypt which ate up every green thing. The whole soil of the valley is impregnated with mineral salts and in some places is perfectly naked of vegetation and covered with a white crust of Sal Eratus nearly an inch thick. Clouds of dust arise as we pass along the road composed of light clay and volcanic ashes which nearly suffocates us, and the reflection of the sun from the whitened ground is hard to bear. I do not think our own Mothers would know their sons were they to see us after our days drive with our clothes ragged, and coverd with dust, our faces coverd with exhuberant whiskers which are all of one color, namely, that of the Soil on which we travel, and guttered down with stripe's of dirt of a darker color which indicate the spot where the perspiration has rolld off our brows. Some of us are shoeless, hatless and nearly clothes less and we are generally so tired when we
arrive at camp that we feel no inclination to mend or repair the rents our clothes sustain on our journey. We passed the junction of a road from the other side of the river with the one on which we are travelling which we supposed to be the one from the South side of the Salt Lake but no wagons had travelled it this season. We found a very good camp this evening and camped early. The company with which I am travelling left one of their wagons at this place. This evening we heard of the first depredation which has been committed by the Indians on our road as far as we can learn. An old Tennessee River pilot by the name of Stump who has been travelling near our train for some time had one of his oxen mortally wounded by the Indians who shot 3 arrows into it. This practice is quite common among the Indians in this country who wound the animals of the Emigrants in order to oblige them to be left behind when they kill and eat them. The Indians have probably been held in check by the great number of people passing through the valley recently as this is the first occurrence of the kind we have heard of this season.

Thursday [July] 12. Nothing worthy of remark transpired this morning. We found a tolerable good place to feed our animals at noon, shortly after leaving which, in the afternoon, the river crowded our road very close to the mountain for 1½ a mile leaving us barely room to pass at its foot after which its course turned directly across the valley which at this point stretched before us in a wide plain covered with mineral salts and Sage Wood such as I have previously described. We were obliged to travel some 10 miles before we struck the river again. Here we were obliged to camp although there was no grass for our teams except a very scattering growth of stunted and withered herbage—nearly crisped up by the heat of the weather and dryness of the Soil. Though we find the heat barely supportable during the day the nights here are always cool and sometimes unpleasantly cold.

29 The Indians who inhabited the banks of the Humboldt River were the despised Diggers. A primitive people, they had been driven into the desert by more powerful neighbors. They existed in a harsh, inhospitable environment and grew accustomed to eating almost anything from rancid roots to “fat black crickets of the valley and the plenitude of their own vermin.” Beggars and thieves, they rarely attacked a caravan of any size. What they had done to “Stump,” who apparently was alone, was typical of their depredations. Leeper, Argonauts of Forty-nine, 57.
Friday [July] 13th As our teams had no grass to mention during the previous night we made an early start in order to find a more plentifull camp in which we succeeded after travelling about 5 miles. Here we remained until we got our Breakfast after which we drove quite rapidly and nooned within \( \frac{1}{2} \) a mile of 2 trains ahead of us. Within the last 3 days some 20 teams have passd us but we manage to keep within sight and sometimes within hailing distance of them Nothing of note happened during the afternoon—we found a beautifull little peninsula nearly surrounded by the river and coverd with very fine grass and we campd quite early.

Saturday [July] 14th Much the same incidents as on the preceding day, grass rather more plentifull but of the Saleratus Kind which is very poor for mules and cattle and sometimes injurious Passd a spot where the river extends itself over a large portion of its valley which is thus converted into a swamp covered with rushes and long grass. in the afternoon we were obliged to take to the mountains in order to avoid a cañon but we reached the river again after some 3 hours driving We passd a very good ox waggon on the river bank abandoned by its owners—grass still poor and country barren—had a very poor camp this evening and the mules suffered in consequence.

Sunday [July] 15th Started early in order to find good grass but did not succeed all day Passd over some places where the ground was coverd white with saleratus the dust from which smelt nearly as strong as harts horn. Encountered in the afternoon a number of low Sand Hills over which I found it difficult to drive my team which fails considerably owing to the poor feed. Found a tolerable camp some distance from the road but not until some time after sundown.

Monday [July] 16. This day we encountered the worst road we have yet met with, as we had to pass over the Sand Hills which descend from the mountains at this place, encroaching on the valley of the river to such an extent as to make it impossible to travel in the bottom. One of my mules became completely tired out in the morning but as the company decided to go on in search of better grass, of which there
was next to none at this point I endeavored to accompany them in the afternoon but was compelld to stop after travelling about 4 miles. I found a little spot where there was sufficient grass for my team and as the company promised to wait for me I determined not to proceed untill next morining, when my mules with a full stomach and ½ a days rest would be fully able to contend with any road I was likely to meet with.

Tuesday [July] 17. According to my previous intentions I started before day to overtake the train with which I had been journeying but on arriving at their camp I found they had been gone ½ an hour and as my mule continued ill I determined to remain where I was untill the remainder of the company under Captain Eikenbury came up. I spent the day in rearranging my load and throwing out all I could possibly do without. The remainder of the oxtrain arrived this day and I determined to accompany them in the morning. Weather very warm and grass very scarce withering and drying up every day. The times are rather gloomy for the emigrants and I felt accordingly anxious and sorrowfull.

Wednesday [July] 18. Started before the train and drove 14 miles. My sick mule gave out before I reached camp, which as usual was destitute of grass, and was strewed with the remains of waggons and their loading. I shifted my camp to Captain Eikenburys in the afternoon, for better grass. Negotiated for the purchase of a horse to strengthen my team and think I shall probably get him. Weather excessively hot.

Thursday [July] 19. Drove about 10 miles (I having succeeded in getting a horse) and campd on the river where as usual we found no grass—nothing but Willow Bushes for our teams to eat. The table lands extend here quite to the banks of the river and consequently Camps are far distant from each other. Drove in the afternoon till nearly dark and campd on the river. Earth coverd with saleratus and potash and the water in the ponds, the same color, and nearly as strong as ley. Let my mules run all night without a guard for the first time—all of us being weary anxious and nearly tired out.
Friday [July] 20. Drove again this morning to another camp on the river but found but little grass—and my mule still continues ill. Started about 5 in the afternoon to avoid the heat and expecting to reach a place called the “Sleugh” represented to be distant from our camp 15 miles but we travelled till daylight next morning without finding it and our teams being tired out we were obliged to stop. We travelled nearly 28 miles during the night—no grass.

Saturday [July] 21st. Found the “Sleugh” this morning after a drive of 4 miles. Campd all day to rest our teams. Report of a man being shot for setting the grass on fire—numerous arrivals.

Sunday [July] 22. Drove 5 miles for more grass. The company left 2 wagons at this place. Drove 11 miles in the afternoon to the head of the “Sink” of the river—Desolate country—arid sterile and barren—plenty of grass but very poor in quality on the borders of the Swamp. Mosquitoes very troublesome at night.

Monday [July] 23. Drove 7 or 8 miles to another camp at the lower end of the “Sink” and hearing that there was no grass below we determined to remain and rest our weary teams where there was some little grass yet to be found. Very discouraging reports about the 45 miles of Desert Country we have to cross. The camps are strewn with wagons and articles of every kind left by the Emigrants—4 wagons of the company left today determined to push through—most miserable water at this place and no wood except the wagons left by the Emigrants. Cut and cured a small quantity of grass for my team in passing the “Desert” Captain of the company went ahead to make discoveries.

In western Nevada about thirty miles north of the town of Fallon, the Humboldt River spreads itself out over the earth in what is called the Humboldt Sink. The water forms alkaline pools and either seeps into the ground or evaporates. The sink is actually an intermittently dry lake bed.

Ahead of Berrien lay the most dreaded crossing on the California Trail. For a good summary of what Mark Twain called “one prodigious graveyard,” see Dale L. Morgan, The Humboldt: Highroad of the West (The Rivers of America, ed., Stephen Vincent Benét and Carl Carmer; New York, 1943), 192-196. Most accounts mention the terrible aridity of the land which extends westward from the terminus of the Humboldt Sink for approximately fifty miles until relieved by the Truckee River. It is still a forbidding stretch of ground. Motorists can hardly pass through this stark region and its alkali flats without feeling a repugnance toward nature’s hostility.
Tuesday [July] 24. This morning a company of “Packers,” came to our camp and during a conversation which ensued one of them mentioned the loss on the road of one of their companions who died and was buried at the Salt Lake of “mountain fever” and who to my great grief and surprise I discovered to have been my old friend Jacob Rapel[fo] for whom I was looking every day. This melancholy news joined to the gloomy prospect of the sandy Desert before us, and the weakened state of my team about which I felt great anxiety contributed to depress my spirits to their lowest ebb, and forebodings of the most sorrowfull kind continued to haunt me all day. Jacob was taken sick after leaving the upper Platte Ferry and the gentleman who mentioned his death, to me, a Dr Ormsby from Pennsylvania told me, he hauled him a long time in his waggon, and at one time thought he would get better, but he gradually grew worse and they buried him in the Strangers Burying ground at the Mormon City About 8’ o’clock we got under weigh for the “Sulphur Wells,” the last water we were to find this side of the Desert. We arrived there in about 2 Hours and turned out to “water” as for grass there was none there. The Water itself was very unpleasant both to taste and smell and of a greenish color, but was cool and the cattle drank it eagerly and on the whole perhaps it was not unwholesome. Here as at every previous camp we found remnants of waggons and articles of every description scattered over the ground which the weakness of their teams made it impossible for their owners to remove. I supplied myself here with an extra sett of Harness so that I might be able to work all 5 of my animals should occasion require, and I could have easily supplied myself with a dozen. No description I can give can picture the desolate appearance of every thing here to me, but the gloomy prospect of the journey before me made me perhaps see every thing through a gloomy medium. In a notice to Emigrants which was posted in a conspicuous place for their information, occurr’d these words, “We have crossd the Desert and find it 45 miles long, 15 heavy sand—Be careful to drive in the night Expect to find the worst desert you ever saw and you will find it worse than you expected.” At ½ past 2 having made all our preparations, we started
on our journey. The weather was very warm and we drove slow in consequence. Every now and then we would pass a dead animal in the road which had given out and been left behind. A little after sundown we passed a small creek or slough of putrid poisonous water and then found ourselves on what is properly termed the "Desert" 33 miles across. Of this part of my journey I can give no description the night soon becoming so dark as to render the face of the country indistinct though I could perceive we were travelling through a sort of valley with a range of low Hills (mountains), on either hand. After travelling some little time the road became so heavy that I found it necessary to harness my extra mule to strengthen my team We continued driving without intermission till day break when one of my mules became very tired. I was compelled to stop and feed them with the Hay I had cured for them which greatly refreshed them. I also gave them a little Flour and water about a quart a piece [sic] which served to give them strength. Previous to my stopping I had passed several waggons left on the Desert, the teams having been driven forward to water and grass which was now within 15 miles—after resting about 11/2 hours I drove on again passing a number of waggons as above described until I got within 9 miles of the River when finding it impossible to proceed any farther with my tired team through the deep sand I was forced to leave my waggon, in charge of my partner, and drive my mules forward to water. I attempted to drive my mules before my pony but being very hungry they could not be kept together, but would wander from the road in fruitless search after grass, so that at last I was obliged to lead them, a task which I soon found was the hardest work I had ever attempted. The sand was very deep. The sun shone very hot. The mules very obstinate and anxious to bite at every bunch of Grease Wood, pulling me constantly from one side of the road to the other, and as I had walked all night I was very tired and nearly worn out and had I not procured a small drink of cold coffee from one of the waggons of our train, I must have perished before I reached the river from excessive heat and exhaustion. I arrived at the river (Carson River) about 12 o'clock and my thirsty mules and myself luxuriated for a time in an abundant drink. Shortly after the cattle arrived from the train and we drove them about 3 miles up the river and crossed
them over to a small peninsula on the other side when we found some very fine grass. Here we allow’d them to remain untill the evening of the 26th when we drove them out to our waggons and hauled them into a camp about 4 miles above where we arrived with them on the morning of Friday 27. Here we found a profusion of fine grass and plenty of wood and water. We determined to remain here a day or more to rest our teams and ourselves also, as the men need repose almost as much as the debilitated and hard worked animals. Carson River is a fine stream and from what information we can procure as long as we remain on its banks (a distance of 80 miles) we shall find good grass and every convenience for camping. Thus we may consider the great peril of our journey over & indulge ourselves with the prospect of a certain pleasant and speedy trip over the remaining miles we have to travel though our joy is much repressd when we think of the fate of those who are coming after us by the same road and of hardships they will be forced to endure. In the St Marys Valley the mischief is already done, for the last 150 miles above the Sink it is nothing but a desert plain. What little grass there has been has dissappeared under the hoofs of a thousand hungry mules and Cattle and the effects of a burning sun on a parched ashy and alkaline soil. There is not a Spear of grass remaining but what is absolutely deleterious to animals, swelling them up with alkali and caus-ing them to void all their flesh and strength away in a profu-sion of urine—and the loss of their teams and waggons are amongst the smallest hardships the Emigrants behind are bound to suffer. In order to push ahead and lighten their loads they have thrown away every thing (including provisions) which they could possibly spare, and consequently when their teams fail them, in a great many instances, sufferings of the most appaling nature will be sure to occur, and I should not be surprised if thousands lay their bones in that desert valley. The Road across the Desert is even now becoming unpleasant from the stench arising from the Carcasses of dead Cattle and Horses and every day adds to the number. Although I may consider myself as one of the fortunate, were I hired to endure the same hardships and perils and suffer the same anxieties which have occurrd to me on this trip not all the gold in California would tempt me.
Saturday [July] 28th. Remained in camp until the afternoon of this day when we again harnessed up our teams, proposing to cross a strip of sand Desert which we were informed was 12 miles across, and commenced 4 miles from our camp. The information we received was not correct however, for we found the road at least 20 miles long. We camped on the River late in the night with poor grass for the animals.

Sunday [July] 29. As our animals had but a sorry supper, we hunted about to find them some good grass which we fortunately succeeded in doing, on the opposite side of the River. We allowed them to graze until 2 PM, when we started to cross another Desert said to be 15 miles across but which we found to be 25. Being the foremost team I reached camp at ½ past 10, our other teams did not arrive till 2 and three of them remained out all night. The camps on this River though distant from each other are generally good—fine water, grass, and timber with little or no alkali to poison our animals and impair their strength. The River takes its rise among the mountains of the "Sierra Nevada" and is fed by the eternal snow which is found there. The water is consequently good though warm from the effects of the heated earth through which it passes. It is from 20 to 30 yards wide and deep enough to swim a horse in most places. Like the St Marys River it also has its lake or Sink and has no communication with the Ocean.

Monday [July] 30th. Remained in camp till 4 in the afternoon when we started again on our tedious journey. We had been told that 6 or 7 miles above the Road left the river and took to the Mountains, and as it was reported, there was a very difficult pass to go through at that place, we wished to get as near it as possible, so as to make an early start in the cool of the day. The pass in question was said to be but 5 miles long but that it would probably take 2 days to get through it. We camped within a short distance of the point at which the road leaves the river and went to bed duly impressed with the arduous task which awaited us in the morning. Night quite cool and Snow visible on the mountains in the distance.

Tuesday [July] 31st. Got an early Breakfast and made an early start, this morning. We ascended and descended a very steep stony Hill near the River and then struck out
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across the Bluffs leaving the river on the left. We found the road very rough and stony in places and heavy with sand but we soon proved the information we had received to be incorrect for by 1 O clock we again reached the river having travelld about 10 miles. The country we passd over this morning presents a better appearance than we have seen for some time. The Hill Sides were over spread with scattering Cedar trees or Bushes. Small Springs are occasionally found, and the mountains in the distance are coverd with Pine and Fir trees. (Timber of any kind has for a long time been quite a rarity with us, not a solitary tree growing on Marys River from its source to its termination) Started again at 6 PM leaving the river and passing through a romantic looking defile between 2 mountains into a small valley where we found fine grass, fine Spring Water, and a large Hot Spring. Here we campd for the night which was unpleasantly cold.

Wednesday August 1st. This morning after a drive of 3 or 4 miles over a heavy Sandy road we again came in sight of the River and after we reached it we travelld up its banks untill noon. The valley itself however though covered with fine pasturage was so obstructed with sloughs and swamps that we were forced to keep on the table lands which extend from the foot of the mountains and which being composed of Sand rendered our road very hard on the cattle. We nooned by the banks of a beautifull little rivulet of spring water, fresh from the mountains which was deliciously cool bright and sparkling. After dinner we again got under weigh and after crossing some swampy land, and small mountain streams, we passd close by the foot of a mountain, from the base of which, a number of hot Springs issued forth, so hot as almost to scald the hand when immersed in them. We campd at a spot where the sleughs and swampy land first recedes from the mountain, leaving a large extent of well watered and fertile land coverd with fine grass, for the benefit of the jaded teams of the emigrants. We are favored with bright and beautifull moonlight nights but they are unpleasantly cold.

Thursday August 2 Continued travelling up the valley which gradually became narrower and at noon we were opposite the spot where the River forks. Here our road began to ascend some Hills and it was plainly perceptible to all that
we must soon cross the immense mountains, which reared their lofty peaks above us. In the afternoon we arrived at the mouth of a pass or gorge in the mountains through which the right hand branch of the river issues. We proceeded up the gorge about a mile and finding a spot of good grass we camped for the night being unwilling to attempt the dangers of the rocky road, some of which were explained to us by a paper we found left on a large rock for the benefit of the emigrants. The scenery here was remarkably wild and beautiful and reminded me of pictures I have seen of Italian mountains, far surpassing anything of the kind we have met with on our route.

Friday [August] 3. This day will always be remembered by me as the day on which we passed through one of the most difficult dangerous and impracticable roads that can be found on the American Continent and that we did so successfully and without serious accident will always surprise me. To a person unacquainted with such a country, the feat of passing over the stupendous Hills and rocks which we encountered would appear foolhardy and hazardous in the extreme and that our wagons could be taken over in safety would be pronounced impossible. Imagine Hills of such steep ascent that 10 yoke of cattle and the united efforts of 15 men were required to force the wagons up them, the road itself composed of rocks of all shapes, sizes, and dimensions and threatening destruction to the Wagons at every step of the way. Over these Hills and rocks the cattle clambered frequently slipping on their knees & falling down, but jumping up again to renew their labor, urged on by the whips of the drivers which cracked like pistols. We crossed the river 3 times, twice on bridges of pine logs and once we forded it. We commenced the ascent at one hour after sunrise and we succeeded in getting through at 6 in the afternoon the distance being 5 miles. The river in its whole course through this Cañon is a rushing, roaring, torrent, its channel obstructed with rocks which break its surface into a sheet of white feathery foam which sparkled in the sunlight like glittering diamonds. The Mountains on each side are most magnificent, and tower above in every variety of picturesque beauty. Immense Pine, Spruce and Fir trees clothe their sides giving a lively appearance to them and the whole taken together is one of the
grandest sights I have ever seen. After getting through the gorge we camped in a beautiful valley surrounded still by the mountains where we found an abundance of fine grass and water. Here we found a company of "Mormons" encamped who were journeying to the Salt Lake. They gave us some information about California but as all their tales did not agree we did not put much confidence in them. Large quantities of snow are now seen on the mountain tops near us and in consequence the nights are cold.

Saturday [August] 4th. Remained in camp till 1 in the afternoon when we again drove some 5 miles to the commencement of another Hill we have to ascend and which is represented as being nearly as bad as the gorge we passed yesterday. While in camp a great many pack mules passed us and from one of the gentlemen with them I received news from the States up to the 27th May. He told me the cholera was raging at St Louis and all the towns on the Missouri River33 and also that there had been a great fire at St Louis consuming 14 Squares out of the heart of the city besides several Steamboats He also told me that from the last information he could procure there were between 8 and 9 thousand waggons on the road for this country—the owners of which if they do not return or travel some other route will most infallibly lose their teams and perhaps their lives in this now perfectly desert Country. He himself had a waggon 150 miles back which he never expected to see and he would not go back after it for 5 times its value.

Sunday [August] 5th. Made an early start this morning and after driving 3 miles we arrived at the foot of the mountain ridge we had to cross. Here we found several mule waggons which had packed up their loads on the back of the mules and were waiting for their return to be drawn up. Besides these there was every species of property strewn

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33 By July, 1849, the cholera epidemic had brought death to many people in the cities of St. Louis and New Orleans. Forty-niners were among those who carried it west. John E. Baur, "The Health Factor in the Gold Rush Era," Rushing for Gold, ed. Caughey, 97. Black measles and smallpox, in addition to cholera, were passed on to the Plains Indians and wrought tragic havoc among them. J. R. Gregg, History of the Oregon Trail, Santa Fe Trail and Other Trails (Portland, Ore., 1955), 201. Berrien, among the van of the Forty-niners, fortunately escaped the water-borne Asiatic cholera; an estimated four to five thousand of those who followed him fell victim to this disease. Settle, March of the Mounted Riflemen, 34n.
about, abandoned by the owners, who found themselves unable to carry them over the mountain—Waggons, trunks, Boxes, Axes, Gold Washers, and heavy articles of all kinds—the iron work and 2 sets of Saws for a Saw mill, Harness, Horse shoes, King Bolts Crow Bars, Picket pins and other articles too numerous to mention were scattered in all directions. The Mountain itself was sufficient to damp the courage of almost any one wishing to cross it with a waggon, for the road up its side was so steep and rocky, that it was with difficulty foot men could ascend much less loaded waggons with their teams, and besides this, the difficult part of the road extended ¾ of a mile. Beyond this the road though still steep was capable of being pass'd by single teams. We commenced shortly after our arrival preparing for the ascent and by putting from 10 to 12 yoke of Cattle to each waggon and pushing, pulling with ropes, and shouldering the wheels with the united force of all the company, we were able to get all our teams up by 4 O'clock P M. My waggon was the last one and was the only one that pass'd the mountain without unloading or doubling team. No description I can give would fully portray the difficulty of ascending this mountain or give other than a very faint idea of the horrid road up its side. It took 14 mules 1 hour to draw an empty waggon up, and there were so many stones, rocks, short turns, and trees in the way, that the teams could not draw to advantage but were continually falling down and slipping from one side of the road to the other. We accomplished the ascent of this mountain without the slightest accident though fragments of 9 or 10 waggons scattered about gave evidence of the danger we incurrd. We drove about 4 miles after this and camp'd in a beautifull valley where we found fine grass and a fine stream of ice cold water which emptied into a lake in its centre. We had a beautifull cloudless moonlight night but very cold and in the Morning of Monday 6th the ground was covered with white frost.

[Monday, August 6.] This day we had to cross the dividing ridge distant some 3 miles from our camp so getting an early Breakfast we proceeded to the foot of it where we arrived about 8 o'clock. The ascent of this mountain was not so steep as the one before described but from the swampy nature of the ground in some places (caused by the melting of the snow near the road) I found more difficulty in getting
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up than at the other pass, and had it not been for the kind assistance of the company I travelld with, who sent 7 or 8 men to my assistance, I should never have succeeded in getting my waggon over the mountain. I was obliged to throw out the greatest portion of my load & after my waggon was up, to pack it by hand up the mountain, and I never worked so hard in my life. From the summit of this mountain we had a very extensive view of the surrounding country to the westward which as far as the eye could reach seemed to be nothing more than a succession of rugged rocky and barren looking mountains coverd with pine trees and by their appearance discouraging us in a great degree when we brought to mind that our road lay over them. By the time I had again loaded my waggon the train had left the summit of the mountain, so I followed along in their track, and after driving some 7 miles over a very rough road, I found them encamped in a small valley through which ran a small rivulet which supplied us with delicious ice water fresh from the summit of the mountains. Here after a very hard days labor we rested from our toils, and welcome was the rest to me. As usual the night was very cold and a crisp white frost covered the grass on the morning of Tuesday 7.

[Tuesday, August 7.] We remained in camp untill after 12 when we travelld down some very steep rocky road untill 6 o clock when we campd on the top of a ridge where we found some excellent grass and a fine spring of water called Leek spring, from the abundance of that vegetable in its vicinity. Nothing occurrd during this day worthy of special remark. The road presented the same dreary monotony of Stony Hillsides and Rocky Ridges covered with Emmense Pine trees (some of them 10 feet in diameter and at least 200 feet high[)] through which we were obliged to thread our tedious way. Our road generally lay along the top of a ridge and beneath us on each side we could look down in immense rocky chasms rugged desolate and bare of everything in the shape of vegetation except the tall pines before mentioned which looked like reeds so great was their distance beneath us.

Wednesday [August] 8. After travelling about 5 miles this morning we arrived at a spring in a little valley which seemed to be a general camp from the marks of camp fires in the vicinity. Here we found a notice tacked to a tree
informing us that for the next 125 miles we should find no grass, information almost sufficient to deter us from prosecuting our journey though we were fated to find the information correct for after travelling till nearly night we campd at the bottom of a long and steep ravine where there was but little water and no grass or sign of vegetation except the surrounding pine trees several Bunches of Willow and a few scattering weeds—the animals accordingly had to content themselves with a streak of lean.

The next morning Thursday [August] 9th we made an early start and travelld till 3 o'clock when we reached the last camp in the mountains Here we were obliged to leave our wagons on the Hill and drive our stock 3 miles down the mountain to a small valley on the left for grass and water, of which there is no more to be found for the next 60 miles.

At this place we remained the whole of Friday [August] 10th in order to recruit our animals and cut and cure sufficient Hay to take with us the balance of the way, of this last I procured a nice quantity which I packed up to camp on the back of my Pony and I made every preparation in my power to carry all the forage I could along with me.

Saturday [August] 11 This day I drove in advance of the Ox train and after passing for several miles over some very rocky roads at last descended from the mountains into a valley called Pleasant Valley where as our Mormon "Guide Book" informed us we would "find the first Gold diggings, feed scarce and water plenty." Of the 2 first however we found none and of the last very little and that of a very inferior quality. I continued in advance of the train until 2 o clock PM when I arrived at the forks of the road the right fork leading to Sutters Mills, the left direct to the Fort. As our train purposed to go by the "mills" I was induced to take that road, which I followed until I came upon a collection of log Huts built near the side of a dry "water course, which either is, or empties into, "Webers Creek" I found here Col Jarrots company encamped near the creek he having selected this spot to mine for gold dust, which is

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34 This refers to the region of Coloma Valley where Sutter had constructed his sawmill and where James Marshall a year and a half before had first discovered gold.
found quite plentifully in this vicinity. Discovering here that the mill was 15 miles distant and that I could not reach it this night I determined to camp at this place which I accordingly did, feeding my mules with the hay which I had cut for them. At this place there is a Butcher shop where fresh Beef can be procured at the reasonable price of 50 cents per lb, and a Boarding House also where the equally reasonable price of $3 pr day is asked for meals alone. Everything at these diggings is at the same reasonable rates and Gold and Gold dust is the order of the day.

On the morning of Sunday [August] 12th 2 of Col Jarrots company came in at Breakfast time from a “placere” they had opened the day previous each with ½ an ounce of Gold dust as the fruit of their labors. The grains of the dust were very large and about the size of small grains of corn. One friend of mine told me that for the last 6 days he had cleared from 10 to 20 dollars pr day over all expenses which last, in the gold diggings is no small item. Being anxious to proceed to the city in order to dispose of my animals, and discovering the road I was on led me some 15 miles out of my way I determined to retrace my steps and accordingly I drove back to the forks of the road and took the direct road to the “Fort” distant about 45 miles. I drove till 2 O clock when I arrived at a Spring by the road side and being informed that for the next 25 miles I should find no water I drove my waggon down a ravine to the right of the road where I found some withered grass and turning my mules loose, remained there the Balance of the day.

35 During the latter part of 1848 and throughout 1849, stories of California’s glistening yellow riches dazzled the world. The quantities of gold being extracted were staggering: in 1849 California yielded an estimated $10,151,360 in gold; by 1852, the most rewarding of all years, an estimated $81,294,700 was produced. Robert Glass Cleland, A History of California: The American Period (New York, 1922), 268. In view of the romantic aura which surrounds the Forty-niners, it should never be forgotten that “the large majority returned to San Francisco, whence they either went home completely discouraged, or with renewed energy...” applied themselves to building California. Stewart Edward White, The Forty-niners: A Chronicle of the California Trail and El Dorado (The Chronicles of America Series, ed., Allen Johnson; New Haven, Conn., 1921), 122.

As for “expenses which... in the gold diggings is no small item,” when the emigrant influx rose sharply so did the demand for food, digging equipment, etc. Without a corresponding inflow of goods, miners soon found much of their wealth drained off by inflated prices. Joseph Berrien writes as a Forty-niner before prices were at their highest—a year later the economy of California was badly out of balance. Wyman, California Emigrant Letters, 166-167.
Monday [August] 13. On arriving at the Spring this morning I found there an acquaintance I had made on the road Major Ormsby who had camped there the preceding night. I proposed, that we should travel together, but as he had not yet finished his Breakfast, he told me to drive on, and he would overtake me as he thought his mules traveled faster than mine. I accordingly travelled on slowly and in about 2 Hours arrived at a small creek crossing the road which I did not expect as I had been told there was no water to be found on the road, until we struck the American Fork. Since leaving the mountains the country has been gently rolling with no high hills and scattered over with immense oak trees which resemble apple trees in shape and deceived me more than once. In the Spring there is also plenty of grass but as it is now the dry season, everything is completely dried and parched up. The country looks like one immense park and when the grass is green must be beautiful in the extreme though from the scarcity of water it will never be valuable for the purpose of cultivation. About eleven o'clock we arrived at the top of a Bluff from which we could see the great Sacramento Valley spread before us as far as the eye could reach—extending from the foot of the Bluff till the sight was lost in the mirage which arises from the plain at this season of the year, and looking like a desert which it really is, notwithstanding all that has been said to the contrary. There was scarcely a Bush in sight and no trees except on the margin of the water courses which serve to drain the water from the mountains in the rainy season but which are now dry. Descending this Bluff we proceeded on till we arrived at a "grocery" situated near some water holes in the plain where we watered our mules and also learnt that we had over 20 miles still to travel before we should reach the Rio Americano—we continued on some 5 or 6 miles farther and finding some withered grass in a low spot in the plain we turned out our mules and waited till 3 PM when we started again and driving pretty sharply we hoped to reach the river by dark. In this we succeeded, arriving at the river about 8 in the evening but as there was no grass where we struck it we drove on along its Banks till the darkness compelled us to stop. We found a place where we could water our mules and then picketed them out for the night, no grass.
Tuesday [August] 14th Early this morning we found a good spot of grass near the river and as we were now near the City,¹⁶ (within 6 miles) we determined to remain until evening before we proceeded. We employed ourselves in washing and drying our clothes and in getting rid of the accumulation of dust on our bodies, not having had an opportunity before for some time, viz. since leaving Carson River. About 10 o'clock Major Ormsby arrived he not having succeeded in overtaking me on the day previous. We remained camped together until 5 when we proceeded towards the city where we arrived just after dark and camped in an oak grove near the town. Major Ormsby found his Brother (the same gentleman I met at the Sink or Marys River) camped at this place who gave us a cordial reception, and after providing for our mules and getting our supper, we retired to rest heartily glad that our toilsome journey was over.

Next morning [Wednesday,] August 15. I sold our waggon and mules for $700 reserving the mule I bought on the road in which my partner has no interest. We erected our tent in the Emigrants camp³⁷ and as we still had provisions sufficient for 1 month on hand we began to feel ourselves almost at Home. A number of our acquaintances are also camped at this place among whom are Several of my Belleville and St Louis friends. This place the dignified with the name of City is nothing but a collection of tents or canvass screens, 

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¹⁶ Sacramento, like San Francisco, was a boom town of the 1849 gold rush. Earlier, John Augustus Sutter had erected his remarkable New Helvetia colony along the Sacramento River. The city of Sacramento grew up around his fort. For Sutter the deluge of gold-seekers brought one disappointment after another. Although he died a man of only nominal means and frustrated in his efforts to obtain economic redress, he was held in high respect by many Californians. James Peter Zollinger, Sutter: The Man and His Empire (New York, 1939), 300-342.

³⁷ Rodman Paul believes that exclusive of Indians the population of California grew from approximately 20,000 at the end of 1848 to almost 100,000 by the end of 1849. Paul, California Gold, 23-24. In Hulbert, Forty-niners, 112, it is observed that “no one in the least knows the truth . . .” of the actual number of emigrants, but an estimate that there were 50,000 overland Forty-niners is given. Estimating only the number of Argonauts who employed the major central route, two other authorities have arrived at the approximation of 25,000 westward moving gold-seekers in 1849. Merrill J. Mattes and Esley J. Kirk, “From Ohio to California in 1849: The Gold Rush Journal of Elijah Bryan Farnham,” Indiana Magazine of History, XLVI (September, 1950), 305.
there not being 10 frame Buildings in the City, but there is an immense amount of business done here and the bank of the river and most of the storehouses are filled with goods and provisions which are sold at high rates. The River is navigable up to this point for vessels drawing 12 feet and a number of vessels of respectable size, Bark Ships Brigs and Schooners lie at the wharves, their masts sticking up amongst the trees which fringe the margin of the river. Now that the excitement of my trip is at an end and the pressure of anxiety and motive for undue exertions taken from me, I feel the reaction consequent upon long toil and hardship, and am weak and incapable of exertion. Although in a country where expenses are so high it is necessary to be in the way of making money to meet them, still I find I shall be obliged to rest a few days and recruit my strength before going to the "Mines"—and when I think of the great number of poor fellows who still are contending with the same hardships "by flood and field" from which I am so fortunately exempt at present, but which I found so annoying while encountering them, I feel grateful to the power which has sustained me and suffered me to bring my long journey to a successful conclusion.