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The California and Oregon trail, 1849-1860

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The California and Oregon Trail
1849-1860
by
Amos William Hartman.

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Chapter I.

TRAIL-BREAKERS OF THE GREAT WEST

As the Ohio River was the path for the pioneers of the old Northwest from the East to their new western homes, so, in later years, the Platte River was the route for the pioneers of the Far West from the Mississippi Valley to the territory beyond the Rocky Mountains. The settlers came down the Ohio in boats; they rolled up the sandy valley of the Platte in covered wagons. But the Platte dominated the latter movement perhaps more completely than did the Ohio the former. The trail leading from the Missouri up the Platte, across the mountains at South Pass, thence branching to Oregon and California was, previous to the time of the transcontinental railroads, the chief highway across the continent. The Santa Fe Trail was important in commerce and conquest, but from Santa Fe to the Pacific that route could not compete with the general central route to the north because of the almost impassable mountains and deserts.¹

The period from 1849 to 1860 inclusive, in the history of the great overland trail to the Far West, is set off clearly enough from the preceding and the following periods to lend itself to treatment as a single and natural epoch.

¹ Paxson, The Last American Frontier, p. 86.
The year 1849 was marked by an unprecedented rush over the trail to the newly discovered gold fields of California; the year 1860 was followed by the Civil War, a time in which the people who would have followed the trail were needed for more arduous duties. It is with this period that this paper proposes to deal. But in order to understand adequately these few years it is necessary to understand what came before. The first two chapters will deal with the exploration and early settlement of the territory over which the trail ran and into which it led.

First came the trail-breakers— the trappers and fur-traders and the explorers. In 1803 the United States secured Louisiana from France. In the years 1804 and 1805 Lewis and Clark followed the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains, crossed the mountains to the Clear Water River, followed it to the Snake, and thence followed the latter and the Columbia to the sea. In 1806 these explorers returned by practically the same route to St. Louis. During the winter of 1805-1806 Zebulon Pike explored the region of the Upper Mississippi. In the years 1806-1807 he was sent to explore the Southwest. Pushing up the Arkansas River he reached the vicinity of the present city of Denver. He discovered the peak which now bears his name and then travelled so far south that he was captured by the Spaniards and taken
first to Santa Fe, and then to Chihuahua. Being released, he and his party made their way back to the United States. The reports of these explorers gave the people a more definite idea of the nature of the great area which had just been purchased.

But the West was being overrun slowly but surely even before the journeys of Lewis and Clarke and of Pike, by the fur-traders. And it is to them that we owe much of the subsequent explorations. In 1805 some French hunters accompanied Lewis and Clark as far as the Little Missouri River, in what is now western North Dakota. In August, 1807, on their return journey, Clark's party met two traders near the mouth of the Yellowstone. In the fall of the same year the first fort or fur trading post was erected on the Upper Missouri by Manuel Lisa. This was located at the mouth of the Big Horn River. The St. Louis Missouri Fur Company was organized in 1808, Lisa, the Chouteau brothers, Reuben Lewis and William Clark being leading members. An expedition was sent up the Missouri in 1809 and more forts were built. This company continued to push westward and southward.


More directly concerned with the California and Oregon Trail was the trading post established at the mouth of the Columbia River by John Jacob Astor. In April, 1808, Astor secured a charter from the state of New York which created the American Fur Company. He planned the establishment of a central post at the mouth of the Columbia. From this post parties were to go to the interior to trade with the Indians; ships were to sail north to trade with the Russians and west to trade with China. To this particular enterprise Astor gave the name Pacific Fur Company. Ten other men were later associated with him. It was planned to send one expedition by sea and another by land. The *Tonquin* left New York in September, 1810. She reached the mouth of the Columbia in March, 1811, and the fort, Astoria, was soon built. The overland party was organized at Montreal, Mackinaw and St. Louis. Under the leadership of W. P. Hunt the party started for the Pacific in April, 1811. They went up the Missouri by boat to the mouth of Grand River. There they took to horses and made a detour to the southwest, seeking to avoid the hostile Blackfeet Indians who infested the head waters of the Missouri. Crossing the Wind River Mountains in September they reached Green River, followed it to its source, and crossed the divide to Snake River. On the upper course of the Snake they found the abandoned Henry's
fort, built by the Missouri Fur Company. The party was divided on the Snake, one company taking the right bank and the other the left. Here they were on what later became the Oregon Trail. Following the Snake and the Columbia the first members of the party reached Astoria on January 18, 1812. Others arrived on February 15, 1812, and the last members did not reach the fort until January, 1813. The War of 1812 and the perfidy of some of the men in charge at Astoria during Hunt's absence on a trading expedition caused the post to fall into the hands of the British Northwest company, which soon after merged with the great Hudson Bay Company.5

One more phase of this expedition deserves notice. Late in June, 1812, a party under Robert Stuart left Astoria to return to the States. They followed up the Columbia to the Snake, thence up that stream until September 7, when they left it and crossed to what was probably Bear River, which flows into Great Salt Lake. They ascended this river until September 12, then made an out-of-the-way detour to the north. On the 22d of the month the party crossed the divide and a little later reached the Sweetwater River. Their route then followed the only logical path—the Platte. This party probably crossed the mountains about fifteen miles south of South Pass.6 Thus on the outward journey the Ast-


torians fixed in a general way the course of the Oregon Trail west of the Rockies, and the returning Astorians under Stu-art traverse much of its course to the east of them.

In the Southwest, also, the fur-traders were found. As early as 1805 James Purcell was trading with the Indians in the district to the north of Santa Fe. St. Louis fur traders devoted more attention to the Missouri River trade, but traders were not uncommon on the upper waters of the Ar-kansas by the year 1815. 7

The third notable exploring party sent out by the government was one under the command of Major Stephen H. Long, in the year 1820. The party, eighteen in number, left the Missouri River early in June and followed up the north bank of the Platte to the forks. From the forks they followed up the south bank of the South Platte to the mountains. The first peak to attract their attention was the one which now bears the name of the leader of the party. The return journey was made by way of the Canadian and Arkansas Rivers to Fort Smith. Upon his return Major Long reported very un-favorably upon the country over which he had travelled. He stated that it was almost unfit for cultivation, and that its greatest value might lie in keeping our people from un-duly expanding westward. His report proved to be a veritable

stumbling block to the right understanding of the western country. In Congress any plan for occupation of that region was answered by Long's report.

The Upper Missouri and the Southwest were overrun by what may be called the first movement of the fur-traders. About 1822 what may be called the second movement began, and the central territory of the great West was exploited. The year 1822 brought renewed activity in the fur trade. William Henry Ashley and Andrew Henry, the latter of whom had been engaged in the Missouri River trade, formed a partnership. Instead of building forts or trading posts in the fur country they determined to hold an annual rendezvous where trappers, traders and Indians could come together. The expedition of 1822 went to the Yellowstone region. In the party were James Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, one of the Sublette's and other traders who later became well known. In the following year, David E. Jackson, William F. Sublette and Jedediah S. Smith were in the party. In the spring of 1824 a company of men under Fitzpatrick followed up the Big Horn River to Wind River, then crossed the mountains by way of South Pass. Providing the returning Astorians under Stuart did not cross the Pass, the honor of its discovery must be given to Fitzpatrick. This distinction has been conferred upon

Etienne Provost but proof of a positive nature is lacking that he travelled over South Pass in 1823.9

In November, 1824, Ashley himself set out with a party for the territory beyond the mountains, where the activities of his whole company were now carried on. Following the main stream of the Platte to the forks, then the south branch, he crossed the Rockies by way of Bridger pass. Ashley's party was the first to cross it. After proceeding to Green River, Ashley returned to the States. In 1826 he returned to the fur country and sold out to Smith, Jackson and Sublette. He returned to St. Louis but retained an indirect interest in the fur trade, sending out supplies.10

The American Fur Company began to establish itself beyond the mountains also. In the spring of 1827 Ashley sent out a train of supplies for that company and for his former comrades. With this train was a piece of artillery, a four-pounder, the first wheeled vehicle to cross the mountains.11

Three years later, in the spring of 1820, Milton Sublette conducted a train in which was ten wagon loads of merchan-

9. Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific, pp. 64 - 93.
11. Ibid., p. 171.
dis to Wind River, near South Pass. These were the first wagons on the great overland trail but they did not cross the mountains. After his arrival Smith, Jackson and Sublette sold out to a firm of younger men, Fitzpatrick, Bridger, Henry Fraeb, Milton G. Sublette and others—a firm which went by the name of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.12

Of special note is a journey made by Jedediah S. Smith, a companion of Ashley and later a partner of Jackson and Sublette. He was the first to cross the mountains to California. Leaving the rendezvous near Great Salt Lake in 1826 he struck off to the southwest, following grass and water.13 With him was a party of fifteen men.14 Crossing the Sevier and Virgin Rivers he followed the Colorado for a time, then struck boldly across the desert to the Spanish settlement at San Diego. Wandering some four hundred miles northward he found a trapper's paradise on the San Joaquin and Merced Rivers. With two men Smith went back across the mountains, this time far to the north of where he previously had crossed, and in twenty-eight days reached Salt Lake. In July, 1837, with eighteen men, he left again for California. This time he went by the Colorado route. In the summer of 1828 he led

his party northward toward Oregon. On the Umpqua River, in what is now the state of Oregon, fifteen of his men were killed by Indians. Smith at last reached the Hudson Bay Company's post, Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia River, and from there made his way to the Snake. There he found Jackson looking for him.

In 1832 Captain Benjamin Bonneville crossed the mountains to try his fortune at the fur trade. For four years he persisted but competition by this time was strong and Bonneville was not the type of man to succeed in that sort of work. In 1835, therefore, he withdrew and returned to the army. He did, however, gain the distinction of being the first to take wagons over South Pass to Green River. His first supply train, in 1832, consisted of twenty wagons, drawn by oxen and mules.

One of Bonneville's chief assistants was I. R. Walker. With visions of a rich catch of beaver Bonneville sent Walker to California on a trapping expedition. His party of forty men left Green River in July, 1833, and went to Salt Lake Valley, where they laid in a supply of buffalo meat. On August 7 they started west and finally reached the Humboldt River in what is now central Nevada. The party reached the brink of the Humboldt on October 4, and soon began to be troubled by the Digger Indians. An attack was ordered and

and thirty-nine of the Indians were killed before they would refrain from molesting the party. In crossing the Sierra Nevadas twenty-four horses were lost, seventeen being consumed as food. At last, on November 20, they reached the Pacific Ocean near San Francisco Bay. On the return journey they followed up the San Joaquin River and its tributary the Merced River and this time crossed the Sierras a little to the north, in all probability, of where Smith had crossed it on his winter journey from California to Great Salt Lake. Following their outward path along the Humboldt they continued toward the north, instead of turning east toward Great Salt Lake, and reached the Snake in May, 1837.  

Through the propaganda of Hall J. Kelley, of Boston, Nathaniel J. Wyeth, a pioneer in the ice business in Cambridge, Massachusetts, became interested in the Oregon country. He thought he saw a chance to open up a profitable fur trade in that region, with an all-water route to New York and Europe. Wyeth secured the backing of the Boston firm of Hall, Tucker and Williams, who sent out a ship-load of goods bound for the mouth of the Columbia. Wyeth himself went overland with Sublette, in 1832. At Vancouver he found that the supply ship had been wrecked off the Society Islands and the cargo lost. Wyeth then returned to Boston and organized a second expedition. On his journey to Oregon

this time, in 1834, he carried supplies for the American Fur Company. But Milton Sublette, the head of the Company, repudiated his contract and Wyeth found himself with the goods on his hands. In order to dispose of them he built a trading post at the junction of the Port Neuf and Snake Rivers which he called Fort Hall, after the senior member of the Boston firm of Hall, Tucker and Williams. This is important as one of the few posts on the Oregon Trail. Wyeth's second venture proved little more profitable than the first and after trapping for a while in the West he returned to Cambridge. 18

In 1836 the Hudson Bay Company built Fort Boise at the mouth of the Boise River, below Fort Hall, to compete with Wyeth. In the fall of 1836 Wyeth sold Fort Hall to his competitors. 19 Fort Boise also became an important station on the Oregon Trail. Of even more importance was Fort Laramie, on the Laramie River in the eastern part of the present state of Wyoming. It was first built in 1834 by a party of fur traders under Robert Campbell. In 1835 the post came into the possession of the American Fur Company. 20 A fourth post of which much will be heard was Fort Bridger, built by James Bridger on Black's Fork of Green River in the spring of 1842. 21 This fort was located in what is now the

One more explorer sent out by the government deserves mention—John C. Frémont. On his first expedition, in 1842, he started from the Kansas River, crossed to Grand Island in the Platte, and followed that stream and its south branch to St. Vrain's Fort, a fur trading post in what is now northern Colorado. From there he travelled northward to Fort Laramie, thence along the Platte and the Sweetwater to South Pass and Wind River Mountains. He then returned to St. Louis. In the following year he led a second expedition to the West. Touching at Great Salt Lake he continued to the Dalles on the Columbia. In November, 1843, Frémont started south from the Dalles to ascertain whether or not the Pacific could be reached by any river between the Columbia and the Colorado. The facts were well enough known to trappers but had not yet received scientific confirmation. Marching across the Nevada desert in the dead of winter under difficulties that would have stopped many men he reached Sutter's ranch in California in March, 1844. The crossing of the Sierras was made in the region of the Carson River, where the emigrant trail later crossed. Fremont returned to the States by a southern route. Of his third expedition it is not necessary to speak in this connection.

Thus came the trail-breakers. They aroused an interest in the great region beyond the Mississippi and prepared the way for the second wave, the home-seekers. So long as the West was the country of the fur-traders it played a minor part in the political affairs of the nation. But when settlers came and homes were built the great political issues of the time came to hinge on the West—the annexation of Texas, the War with Mexico, the Oregon boundary dispute, and the question of the political status of this newly acquired territory.
Chapter II.

THE COMING OF THE HOME-SEEKER

The three important regions to be considered in the settlement of the West prior to 1849 are California, the Oregon country and the territory lying around Great Salt Lake. But before dealing with these it will be proper to consider the situation along the frontier in the Mississippi Valley. Louisiana and Missouri were the only states west of the Mississippi in 1821. In that year Mexico revolted and broke away from the rule of Spain. Trade with Santa Fé and the neighboring towns of New Mexico, which had been forbidden by the Spanish, began to flourish under the new régime. First Franklin, then Independence, Missouri, was the starting point. Dry goods, hardware and other commodities were carried overland in covered wagons to Santa Fé. For the twenty-two years 1822-1843 the trade averaged in value over $130,000 annually. But settlers were pushing toward the Southwest also. Arkansas became a state in 1837. Americans began to pour into Texas and became so numerous that Texas revolted from Mexico and in 1845 was annexed to the United States. Such, in brief, were the developments in that direction.

In the meantime the foundations of the future commonwealths of the Pacific coast were being laid. During the

first half of the eighteenth century England was a menace to Spanish commerce in the Pacific. Russia began to push southward from Alaska and threatened to occupy the whole western coast of North America. In order to hold the Pacific and frustrate the aims of her rivals Spain began to fortify California. San Diego was founded in 1769; other missions and forts soon followed, among them San Francisco in 1776 and Los Angeles in 1781. California was settled by soldiers and Franciscan monks. The Indians were submissive and many became nominal Christians, living at the missions. They were the virtual slaves of the monks and it was through their labor that the prosperity of the missions was built up. Wheat, corn, barley, beans, mules, cattle, sheep and goats were raised; salt, soap, butter and coarse woolen cloth were manufactured. By 1818 there were 20,000 Indians--neophytes, as they were called--working in the missions.  

After the War of 1812 had closed Yankee traders began to visit California. Spain was opposed to such trade and for a time many Yankee ships were seized, their cargoes confiscated and their crews imprisoned. However, officials gradually became more lax and after 1818 foreign traders had little or no difficulty in the province. Early in the year 1822 California surrendered to Mexico, the latter having freed herself from Spain. The new governor welcomed foreign trade. Boston merchants sent groceries, cutlery, 

cotton goods, and liquors to California in return for otter and beaver skins and hides. Hides and tallow soon became the chief articles of export. Cattle were killed for the hides and tallow alone, the carcasses being wasted. The hide trade was at its height in the years 1825-1834; Boston merchants handled the greater part of it. After that it began to fall off. The cattle were killed at too young an age and the weight of the hides decreased; the hides were not well cured and were more difficult to tan than those from Argentina. Production of hides rapidly decreased. The number fell from 100,000 in 1838 to 30,000 in 1841--hardly two ship-loads.

The California missions reached the height of their prosperity in the year 1833. Competent men estimated the amount of livestock at 424,000 cattle, 62,500 horses and mules, and 321,500 sheep. The annual grain crop was about 225,000 bushels. The sales from the herds must have totaled between $500,000 and $600,000 in that year. The neophytes numbered 30,000. An attempt was made by the Mexican government to secularize the missions and to substitute regular clergy for the Franciscans. As a result of this the Franciscans undertook a wholesale slaughter of the cattle in order to turn the chief wealth of the missions into cash. In 1834 there were 100,000 head killed. The government planned

to free the neophytes and divide up the cattle and land among them. But the result of the policy was that, being freed, the neophytes refused to work; the missions were systematically looted by public officials. By 1841 the Indian population had been decimated, the mission buildings were in ruins, the grain yield was only 8,000 bushels, and the number of cattle had been reduced to about 28,000. Such were the accomplishments of Spain and Mexico.

With the opening up of trade relations between the United States and California American citizens began to settle there. The first settlers were merchants. Then sailors and mechanics from the merchant ships and whalers began to desert and settle there. Trade between Santa Fé and California was active in the decade 1830-1840; merchants and mule-drivers from Santa Fé settled there. John A. Sutter built his fort on the American River in 1839. In 1841 Russia withdrew from California on account of the exhaustion of the fur-bearing animals and because of British and American protests at St. Petersburg. The Hudson Bay Company, which since 1829 had sent annual brigades to California, ceased operations there after 1845. In short, the contest for California was narrowed down to two nations—Mexico and the United States.

The bridging of the great gap between the States and California by emigrant parties began as early as 1841. Reports concerning California had been scattered in the East and in the spring of 1841 an emigrant party numbering forty-eight in all left Westport, Missouri. The fur-trader Fitzpatrick guided them over South Pass to the vicinity of Great Salt Lake. Then they wandered in a sort of haphazard fashion across the desert to the Sierras, which they crossed at Sonora Pass, south of the usual route of later years. Their wagons were abandoned in the desert. There was little further emigration overland until 1844. In the latter year Joseph B. Chiles, who had crossed with the party of 1841, organized a company of 800 and led it without difficulty to Fort Hall. There the company divided. The majority followed Joseph Walker down the Humboldt River and thence south to Walker Pass. A smaller number went by a more northerly route to the Sacramento River — a route afterwards called the Death Route. In the same year a party of over fifty men, besides many women and children, left the Missouri for the West. About half of the company went to Oregon. The remainder followed down the Humboldt and crossed the Sierras near the head of the Truckee River — probably the first to use that route. They also took the first wagons to California. Considerable propaganda was spread in the East in


1845 in encouragement of emigration. Letters were written from California. L.W. Hastings, who had gone to California from Oregon in 1843, was in the East lecturing on California and preparing an emigrants' guide. Two professional guides met the Oregon emigrants of 1845 at Fort Hall and persuaded some 250 to go to California instead. In 1846 Hastings led an emigrant party across the desert by a new route to the south of Great Salt Lake which shortened the distance but was more perilous. Several parties directed personally by Hastings and James Hudspeth travelled the new route in safety, though losing many cattle. But a party crossing without guides - the famous Donner party - reached the Sierras too late to cross and forty-three perished from starvation. Hastings' Cut-Off was little used after that except by Mormons. The total emigration to California by way of South Pass for the years 1841-1848 was some 650 men and about an equal number of women and children.

Other emigrants were establishing themselves in Oregon. By the boundary treaty made with Great Britain in 1818 the Forty-ninth parallel was settled upon as the boundary between the United States and Canada from the Lake-of-the-Woods to the divide of the Rocky Mountains. The territory west of the mountains lying between $42^\circ$ and $54^\circ 40'$ was to be held jointly by Great Britain and the United States.

for a period of ten years. This was the country known as Oregon. By 1828 the joint occupancy agreement had been continued indefinitely, but could be terminated at a year's notice by either nation.

Note has already been made of the early occupancy of Oregon by the fur-traders. For several years the Hudson Bay Company was practically without a rival there. Then American fur-traders began to operate in the southern part of the territory. Next followed the missionaries. The Indians of Oregon heard about the Christian religion from the fur-traders and from some Iroquois Indians who went from Canada to Oregon. Late in 1831 a delegation of Nez Perce Indians reached St. Louis, having made the journey to ask that missionaries be sent to them.

In response to the call Jason Lee and his nephew Daniel Lee volunteered to go. In the spring of 1834 they set out with Nathaniel J. Wyeth, reaching Fort Vancouver in September. These men were sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church. They established themselves on the Willamette River, about sixty miles from its junction with the Columbia. Several other missionaries and their families were sent by the same church in the years immediately following. Several missions were established but by 1844 all were abandoned except one at the Dalles on the Columbia. In 1847 this was transferred to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, supported by the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed Churches. Marcus Whitman, sent by the Pres-

9. Fish, American Diplomacy, p. 254.
byterian Church, visited Oregon in 1835. The next year he returned as a missionary, taking with him his wife and a fellow missionary, R.H. Spaulding and his wife. Others were sent by the American Board in the following years.

The first regular party of emigrants went to Oregon in 1842. It was under the leadership of Dr. Elijah White who was sent out as sub-Indian agent. The party numbered about 130 persons. In the years following, companies set out each spring for Oregon. The emigration in 1843 was from 875 to 1000, in 1844 it fell off to about 700, in 1845 it soared to about 3,000, and in 1847 reached between 4,000 and 5,000. The years 1842-1848, inclusive, brought a total of about 11,000 or 12,000. A definite settlement of the boundary between the United States and Canada west of the Rockies was necessitated by this migration. After considerable negotiation a treaty was signed and ratified by which the United States secured all of Oregon south of 49° with the exception of the southern end of Vancouver Island. In 1848, two years after the boundary was settled, Oregon Territory was organized, which included all of the present states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, and part of the state of Wyoming.

The third region of settlement in the Far West was the country around Great Salt Lake, embraced in the present

II. Paxson, The Last American Frontier, pp. 75-77.
state of Utah. The Mormon church was organized in western New York in 1830, under the leadership of Joseph Smith. Missionaries were sent to other states, Kirtland, Ohio soon became the strongest Mormon center. By 1838 their chief strength lay in western Missouri, in Clay county and the surrounding territory. But the people of Missouri drove them out, early in 1839, because of their religious beliefs and political practices. Some 12,000 of them went to western Illinois, about forty miles above Quincy. There, on the eastern bank of the Mississippi they built the city of Nauvoo. Privileges were readily granted to them by the state of Illinois, where the party in power hoped to gain their political support. Before the end of 1840 Nauvoo was a city of 15,000 people, and new converts to Mormonism were constantly arriving from different parts of the United States, from Canada and from Europe. Joseph Smith was head of all-prophet and president of the church, mayor of the city and general of the militia which they were allowed to organize.

But the Mormons got into trouble in Illinois as they had in Missouri. They began to practice polygamy. They wielded great political influence because they cast their vote as a unit. As the mob had driven them from Missouri, so it drove them from Nauvoo. Joseph Smith was killed by a mob at Carthage, Illinois, in June, 1844. Brigham Young was elected to succeed him as head of the church. Early in 1846 the desertion of Nauvoo began.

Crossing the state of Iowa in covered wagons the Mormons established temporary quarters on both sides of the Missouri near the present sites of Council Bluffs and Omaha. At the close of 1846 about 12,000 people were assembled in the camps.

In April, 1847, a pioneer band of about 150 persons, mostly men, set out to find a new home for the Mormons in the West. Instead of following the emigrant road on the south side of the Platte to Fort Laramie they followed the north side, so the Mormons would have what might be considered a route of their own. At Fort Laramie they crossed to the south side and followed it for 184 miles along the usual emigrant trail, when it crossed the north bank. By July 7 they had crossed the mountains and reached Fort Bridger. They did not know as yet what their ultimate destination was. They almost went to Oregon, upon the advice of an old trapper, "Pegleg" Smith. Bridger advised them against settling in the Salt Lake region but others recommended it. An advance party of forty-four men was sent to the Salt Lake region to look over the land. The leaders chose a spot near Great Salt Lake and sent word back to the main pioneer body under Brigham Young. Crops were planted and the foundations of Salt Lake City were laid. Young returned to the Missouri. Over 1,600 Mormons settled at Salt Lake City in 1847. Many more crossed the plains in 1848 and by the end of the year the population of the city was about 5,000.

I4. Ibid., pp.155-246.

As has been stated, Texas was annexed to the United States in 1845. This led to war with Mexico during the years 1846-1848. By the treaty of Gaudaloupe Hidalgo, which closed the war, the United States secured Texas to the Rio Grande, and all the Spanish territory from the southern boundary of Oregon to the present boundary between the United States and Mexico, with the exception of a small strip of territory along the Gila River, later secured by the Gila Purchase. Congress refused to organize California and New Mexico into territories in 1848 when Oregon was organized, so all of the land ceded by Mexico, except Texas, remained as a great unorganized territory.

A general survey of the California and Oregon Trail and its western terminals shows that the conditions at the end of the year 1848 were as follows. There were five important forts or trading stations on the route: Fort Kearny, established in 1848 near the upper end of Grand Island on the Platte, Fort Laramie, on the Laramie River near its junction with the Platte, Fort Bridger on Black's Fork of Green River, Fort Hall at the Snake, and Fort Boise below Fort Hall at the mouth of the Boise River. Southwest of Fort Bridger was Salt Lake City with some 5,000 Mormons and a number of surrounding settlements with at least as many more. They were under no form of government except the local government which they themselves instituted. Beyond the Sierras was California. During the Mexican War vol-

unteers enlisted in the East were sent to California, and there discharged. Regulars deserted. These, with the overland emigrants and the foreigners brought the total white population of California by the end of 1848 to about 14,000. Nor did any organized government exist there. The census of 1850 reported 13,087 whites in Oregon. The emigration of 1849 was about 400 and of 1850 about 2,000. Probably most of the emigrants of the latter year came after the census had been taken. A fair estimate of the population at the end of 1848 would place it at about 12,000.

Such in brief was the development of the West prior to the coming of the hosts of emigrants in 1849 and the following years. It will now be possible to enter into a study of the great emigrant trail during those years with better understanding of its relation to western development.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAIL IN '49 -- THE MISSOURI RIVER TO SOUTH PASS

A history of the great overland trail to the West must necessarily be accompanied by a description in some detail of the country through which it ran. Rivers, mountains, barren plains and other geographical features determined to a very great extent its route. Another fact to be kept in mind is that the trail was not a single road leading to the Rocky Mountains and then branching to California and Oregon. It was a road with many branches. Emigrants were always looking for a shorter or a better way. New "cut-offs" were opened from time to time. A road might be a very superior one at a certain time of the year, yet a very inferior one at another. The trail developed so many branches that two men might follow it to California, yet each take an entirely different road except from the mouth of the Sweetwater to a point of a few miles west of South Pass. Yet these various roads were all the part of one great road; they all converged at South Pass; they were all a part of the central route from the Missouri River to the Pacific Coast -- the California and Oregon Trail.

In 1849 two roads led from the Missouri to Fort Laramie--one following either side of the Platte. The older of the two began in western Missouri. The two main outfitting centers were Independence and St. Joseph, -- the latter more important during the decade of the fifties. From Independence, the trail ran westward a few miles to the south bank of the Kansas River which it followed for about eighty miles. The principal crossing was at the present site of Topeka, Kansas. The
trail left the Kansas River there and passed to the northwest
across the Little Vermilion River, a tributary of the Kansas,
across the Big Vermilion, a branch of the Big Blue, across the
Big Blue, which flows into the Kansas and along the Little Blue,
another branch of the Big Blue River. After following the Little
Blue to the divide between that stream and the Platte the trail
crossed the low hills into the Platte Valley. Near the crossing
of the Big Blue the road from St. Joseph and Weston, another
outfitting town between St. Joseph and Independence, joined the
road from Independence. The trail from Independence and its
vicinity to the Platte ran across prairies intersected by numer­
ous streams. The valleys of many of the streams were wooded with
oak, walnut, cottonwood, and other trees. The soil was of a dark
vegetable mould, and in rainy weather the trail became very
muddy and travel difficult.

About fifteen miles above the point where the trail
first touched the Platte, on the right bank of the river at the
head of Grand Island, stood Fort Kearny. In command was the fam­
ous Captain, now Colonel, Bonneville, the fur-trader. His for­
ces consisted of a troop of dragoons and a company of infantry.
The”fort” was composed of a few sod buildings and some tents.

I. Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West, Vol.I,
pp. 464-466.
II. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 465. Chittenden does not mention Weston
but Major Osborne Cross, who went from Fort Leavenworth to Ore­
gon in 1849 with a detachment of troops mentioned it, under the
name of Western. See Report of Major Osborne Cross, Senate Ex­
587, p. 132.
4. Ibid., pp. 138-139.
Fort Kearny was about 330 miles from Independence.

From Fort Kearny this road followed the south bank of the Platte to Fort Laramie. Major Cross characterized the Platte as a stream which can only be remarkable for possessing more sand bars, less depth of water, and more islands half covered with useless timber than other stream of its size in the country.

Bill Nye said that it had "a wide circulation but little influence." Most of the trees were on the islands. From Fort Kearny to the junction of the northern and southern forks of the river the valley is mostly level and the scenery monotonous. There is hardly a ravine or a tributary on the south side. The valley ranges from four or five to as much as twelve miles in width, and is lined with low, rolling, sandy hills, with little vegetation. In a few places the hills become small bluffs. From the forks to Fort Laramie the valley is not so level. Tongues and ridges reach from the bordering hills to the river. The trail had to cross many of these. Deep sand was encountered in many places. The river averages about a mile in width, and is in many places full of small wooded islands. There were at least three fords across the South Platte in 1849. Mr. Delano mentions one about ten miles above the forks, and another fifteen to twenty miles further up. Major Cross passed two fords and crossed at

5. Ibid., p. 142.
the upper one. So many people were crossing that one ford could not have accommodated all. Since the river is shallow the chief obstacle which the immigrants had to avoid was quicksand, which everywhere forms the river bed of the Platte.

The next land-mark after the fords was Ash Hollow. This is located some seventy-five or eighty miles above the junction of the two forks. Those crossing at the lower fords usually traversed this ravine near its mouth. Those crossing at the upper ford had to descend into the hollow near its head and then follow down its course to the North Platte. The descent was abrupt and very difficult. The expedition to which Major Cross was attached was forced to let down its wagons by means of ropes. Between Ash Hollow and Fort Laramie lay a section of country where the rocks had been worn into many curious and interesting formations, a number of which had received names. They were always objects of interest to the emigrant or traveller. About forty miles from Ash Hollow the trail passed Court House Rock, which resembled a huge building. About fifteen miles further on was Chimney Rock; perhaps the most famous of all. It could be seen for thirty-five or forty miles, towering above the plain. The base is a sort of conical hill formed of pink clay, interbedded with volcanic ash. The chimney is of a sandy formation and according to measure-


12. The distances between the various points and brief descriptions are given in Chittenden, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 464-470.
ments made in recent times is 142 feet high and 50 feet in diameter at the base. Some of the formations were a considerable distance from the road, yet owing to the condition of the atmosphere they appeared quite close. This phenomenon often led unknowing emigrants on fruitless trips of observation. About forty-five miles beyond Chimney Rock the trail passed Scott's Bluffs. Richard F. Burton in 1860 described them as being "divided into three distinct masses. The largest, which may be 800 feet high, is on the right, or nearest the river. To its left lies an outwork, a huge, detached cylinder whose capping changes aspect from every direction; and still farther to the left is a second castle, now divided from, but once connected with the others. The whole affair is a spur springing from the main range, and closing upon the Platte so as to leave no room for a road." The road ran between the right hand bluff and the outwork.

Soon after passing Scott's Bluffs the emigrants caught sight of Laramie Peak, in the Black Hills, far off to the northwest, beyond Fort Laramie. Snow was often to be seen on its summit. Following up the North Platte the next point of importance was the Laramie River and, on its western bank, a mile and a half above the junction with the Platte, Fort Laramie itself. The river was a rapid stream about fifty yards wide. Fort Laramie was purchased by the United States government early in 1849 from the American Fur Company, but no troops arrived until July.

In June Major Cross described it as follows: "This fort is built

15. Hammond, Quaint and Historic Forts of North America, p. 25.
in the form of a quadrangular figure, and of unbaked clay, or adobes; the wall is about twenty feet high, with a small palisading on a part of it. There are two block-houses at the corners, diagonally from each other. Over the main entrance which faces the river, there is also another small blockhouse. The buildings are made inside, the wall forming a part of them. They are very small, and have but few comforts to recommend them."

The second road from the Missouri to Fort Laramie left the river at Kanesville, a Mormon town situated on the present site of Council Bluffs, Iowa. The first stream of importance which the trail crossed was the Elkhorn River, a tributary of the Platte about 200 feet wide. The intervening country was a high rolling prairie elevated about 300 feet above the level of the Missouri and very much broken by ravines. The trail struck the Platte soon after crossing the Elkhorn and followed the valley of that stream more or less closely for a distance of from seventy-five to eighty miles to the Loup Fork. This was the greatest obstacle in the way of the emigrants following the northern bank of the Platte. They found a shallow stream averaging about 1,000 yards wide, full of sand bars. These bars formed and shifted rapidly, making the question of a ferry very difficult. The quick-sand river bed made fording difficult. Beyond the Loup Fork was Wood River, the only stream of any size between the Loup and Fort Laramie. The road followed the Platte from a short


distance west of Wood river to Fort Laramie without leaving it except for detours of a few miles to avoid bluffs or rough land. Little need be said about this long stretch. Except that the bluffs were somewhat bolder on the northern bank, the description of the southern bank will fit it. For 200 miles there was but a single tree. This single tree, situated a few miles above and opposite Ash Hollow, bore the name of Lone Tree. At Fort Laramie the trail crossed to the south side of the Platte and the two roads merged. Some few adventurous immigrants may possibly have followed the northern bank of the Platte westward from this point but if there were a few there were certainly only a few. According to Chittenden, Fort Laramie was 667 miles from Independence by way of the trail. From Kanesville it was about 500 miles.

Beyond Fort Laramie the trail followed the Platte for a distance of some 125 miles further. The plains gave way to the foothills. To the south of the river lay the Black Hills; on the banks of the river were steep bluffs and rocky cliffs which forced the trail back from the river in many places. The hills were in many places covered with pine and cedar trees, but sagebrush also made its appearance. The Platte become a clear and limpid little river instead of a wide, muddy one. In this region the emigrants gained their first experience with desolate wastes, covered with sage brush and impregnated with alkali. Near the mouth

18. Langworthy Scenery of the Plains, Mountains and Mines, p. 48. Other travellers also mention it.
20. Langworthy, op. cit., p56
21. Report of Major Cross, op. cit., pp. 159-164
of Deer Creek the trail crossed the Platte and bade farewell to the stream which it had followed so far. A ford was impossible because of the depth and swiftness of the river so ferries carried the men and wagons across. Between the Platte and the Sweetwater River, which entered the Platte some distance above the ferry, was a desert of about fifty miles in extent, covered for the most part with sage.

Almost immediately upon striking the Sweetwater the trail passed two famous landmarks - Independence Rock and Devil's Gate. As seen by Delano Independence Rock was "a huge boulder of naked granite, forty or fifty rods long, and perhaps eighty feet high. It stands isolated upon the plain, about six miles from the mountains on the right, and three from those on the left. It is not difficult of access on its southern point, and may be ascended in many places on the east. In a deep crevice on the south, is a spring of ice-cold water — a perfect luxury to the thirsty emigrant. Hundreds of names are painted on its south wall, and among them I observed some dated 1836." Stansbury observes that it "was covered with names of the passing emigrants, some of whom seemed determined, judging from the size of their inscriptions, that they would go down to posterity in all their fair proportions." Continuing he says: "A short distance beyond was a range of granite hills, stretching entirely across the valley, and continuous with a range extending to the north. Through this range the Sweetwater passes, in a narrow

cleft or gorge, about two hundred yards in length, called the Devil's Gate. The space between the cliff on either side did not in some places exceed forty feet. The height was from three to four hundred feet, very nearly perpendicular, and, on the south side, overhanging. Through this romantic pass the river brawls and frets over broken masses of rock that obstruct its passage, affording one of the most lovely, cool, and refreshing retreats from the eternal sunshine without that imagination could desire.

From Devil's Gate the trail continued up the Sweetwater for one hundred miles, crossing and recrossing many times. About thirty-six miles west of Devil's Gate the road passed through a canon where it was forced to cross the stream three times within a very short distance. This place was known as the Three Crossings of the Sweetwater. This river well lived up to its name for its waters were fresh and pure, in contrast with the alkali water of the Platte. The valley in general consisted of rolling land, averaging from five to ten miles wide. The soil was sandy, so much in some places that it was all sandy to the north of the river were the Rattlesnake Hills, extending for about a hundred miles east and west. To the south were the Sweetwater Hills.

A few miles beyond the point where the trail left the Sweetwater was South Pass, with an elevation of 7,500 feet above sea-level. The ascent was so gradual that emigrants often continued to look for the divide after having crossed it. Chandless, an Englishman, travelling as a teamster, thus describes it: "No mountain ravine is this - no gorge of Killiecrankie, that a few highlanders might defend - no Thermopylae with space for one

chariot only; but an almost level table land, of twenty miles from north to south, and four or five across: a field of battle large enough for all the armies of the world. Close on our left was Table Mountain, one of the dullest and least graceful elevations I ever saw; and those to the north were in no wise remarkable. Most people were more deeply impressed by the Wind River Mountains to the north of the Pass, with Fremont's Peak towering the clouds, than was Mr. Chandless.

Just beyond the pass was Pacific Springs, whose water as will be surmised from the name, flowed into the Pacific Ocean. It was no more than a green swamp or morass of some twenty acres in area. About twenty miles beyond South Pass the road crossed the Little Sandy, a tributary of the Big Sandy, in turn a branch of Green River.

So far the trail has been relatively simple and easy to follow. It has been guided by two physiographical features—the Platte River and South Pass. Beyond this point there was a possibility of several routes, and the immigrants had taken advantage of the possibility.


Chapter IV

THE TRAIL IN '49 - SOUTH PASS TO OREGON AND CALIFORNIA

After crossing South Pass the trail had three destinations - Oregon, Salt Lake City, and California. This in itself, aside from all question of advantageous routes, necessitated the branching of the trail. It forked first just beyond the Little Sandy, one branch going south-westward toward Fort Bridger and the other more directly west to the valley of Bear River.

Let us first trace the route of the more southerly one. From the Little Sandy the trail crossed a dreary, desert country covered with sage-brush to the Big Sandy, thence down that stream along the right bank nearly to its junction with Green River. Leaving the Big Sandy, it crossed a level plain to Green River, a stream fringed with narrow groves of cottonwood trees. The Green, a clear swift river, was a difficult one to cross. After crossing the river the trail followed the western bank for a short distance, then crossed a ridge to Black's Fork, one of its tributaries. This stream was then followed to Fort Bridger, located upon an island in the river. This fort was a mere trading post built of logs. Supplies could be obtained there and a blacksmith shop was maintained.


2. Ibid., pp. 73-74; also Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West, Vol. I, p. 476.
From Fort Bridger one branch of the trail led to California by way of Salt Lake City. Another branch turned to the north. This latter road reached Muddy Fork, part of the Green River system, and followed it about thirty miles toward its source. It then crossed the dividing ridge between the waters of Green River and Bear River, a ridge with a higher altitude than South Pass. Fremont gives it as 8,234 feet. Ten miles down the river was the junction with Sublette's Cut-Off.

This road, Sublette's Cut-Off, was the more northerly of the two roads leaving the fork of the trail at the Little Sandy. From the Little Sandy to the Big Sandy the trail crossed an arid plain about sixteen miles wide. The latter stream was the last place where grass and water could be secured for a distance of over fifty miles. The desert between the Big Sandy


4. Topographical Map of the Road from Missouri to Oregon, Sec. V. This map, compiled by Charles Preuss from field notes and journals kept by himself and Fremont is very valuable in a study of the overland trail. Topographical features are shown in detail.

and Green River was one of the most dreaded parts of the whole route from the Missouri to the West. The soil was of a soft, dry, ashy nature, and as there was little rain in that part of the country, the dust often came near to producing suffocation. After crossing this waste the road crossed Green River, which had to be ferried. After following a short distance down the river the road crossed a ridge to Fontanelle Creek, then followed the valley of this creek, a branch of Green River, to the divide between that stream and the Bear River. There as we have seen, it joined anew the road which has been traced in its detour to Fort Bridger. Sublette's Cut-Off shortened the route by some fifty miles but it had the disadvantages of missing Fort Bridger and of having the fifty-mile waterless desert to cross.

The Bear River rises in the mountains, almost directly east of Salt Lake City, flows northward into the state of Idaho, then makes a great bend and flows southward into Great Salt Lake. The trail followed down the river to the bend. On each side of the stream were mountains, spurs of which sometimes approached the river and made the road rough. The valley of the river varies from two to four miles in width. Bunch grass grew on the hills and mountains; toward

6. Delano, op. cit., p. 120.
their summits fir and cedar trees were sometimes found. Along the bottom of the winding stream were willows. In following down the right bank of the river three tributaries had to be crossed: Smith's Fork, Thomas's Fork (or Thompson's Fork as it is sometimes called) and Tullick's Fork. None of these caused much difficulty.

At the bend of the river, when the trail left it were the Soda Springs or Beer Springs. Delano has given a good description of them. "At night we reached the first Beer Springs, two conical mounds, twenty feet high, with a base of more than a hundred feet in diameter, which was formed by the deposit of lime from the water. These are rather more than half a mile north of the road, and near them is a fine brook, lined with cedars which run into the river a mile or two below. These springs are one of the greatest luxuries on the whole route. They are highly charged with carbonic acid gas, and are as delicious as they are refreshing. They are equal to any soda water in the world. Two miles below are a dozen more, near the brink of the river, some of which are even stronger than the upper ones. A spring is on the right bank, near the Soda Springs, through which volumes of gas are discharged with a loud noise, resembling the ejection of steam from a boiler, and is, in consequence, called Steamboat Spring."
Not everyone praised the water of the springs so highly. Tastes seemed to differ.

Just beyond Soda Springs another cut-off left the trail — another road to California. It had just been laid out in the summer of 1849. The road to Oregon continued to the north, crossed the divide into the valley of the Lewis or Snake River and followed down one of its branches, the Port Neuf. About nine miles above the mouth of this branch, on the left bank of the Snake was Fort Hall. The fort was built of adobe, much in the shops of Fort Laramie, though smaller. At one corner was a blockhouse.

About forty-five miles below Fort Hall the Raft River emptied into the Snake. There the last road branched off the Oregon Trail for California. The latter trail followed the left bank of the Snake over twenty miles of hills, and sterile plains covered with sage-brush to American Falls, where the Snake passed into a deep canon, with perpendicular sides. At the head of the canon were the falls. In the center of the river a ledge of rock divides the stream into two parts. Between the right bank and the ledge is a fall of about eight feet; on the left side the fall is much less. The road for the remainder of the distance to Raft River crossed many ravines and hills and the dust was troublesome.


11. Ibid., pp. 191-194.
From American Falls to Fort Boise, near the mouth of the Boise River, the Snake river flowed practically all the way through a deep rocky canon, with sides often ranging from two hundred to five hundred feet high. From the Raft River the trail follows the left bank of the Snake for about 130 miles and then crossed that stream. Yet here the crossing was difficult and some travellers preferred to follow the left bank clear to Fort Boise. Major Cross and his command followed the latter route. In 1850 James M. Sullivan followed the left bank and mentions meeting forty wagons one day on the same route. In the same year Doctor Maynard and his party followed this road. The country along the Snake was dry and very dusty. The trail lay across barren plains and steep hills which grew little but sagebrush. There were few springs and even the water in the Snake and its tributaries was usually difficult to obtain because of the steep, rocky banks. From Raft River to Fort Boise, by way of the left bank of the Snake, the route was truly one to be dreaded - a long stretch of over 250 miles. The road which crossed the Snake was little if any shorter than the one which followed the left bank but it had the advantage of somewhat better grass and water. From the crossing of the Snake it struck off to the northwest,

12. Ibid., pp. 190-206.
leaving the stream, until it reached the Boise River. Water and grass were better along this stream than along the Snake. The trail followed down the valley to Fort Boise, where it crossed the Snake again and joined the road which followed the left bank.

Fort Boise was similar in appearance to Fort Hall - the walls were of clay, or adobe, the height of a single-story dwelling. Against the walls on the inside of the fort, the storehouses and the quarters of the employees were built.

Leaving Fort Boise the trail followed the left bank of the Snake, crossed one of its branches, the Malheur River, a stream about twenty yards wide at the ford, and finally, about twenty-three miles beyond the Malheur, left the Snake for the last time. To the northwest were the forest-covered Blue Mountains often surrounded by smoke from forest fires. After leaving the Snake the trail followed up one of its tributaries, Burntwood Creek, or Burnt River, about twenty-five miles, then crossed a divide to Powder River. Descending the latter stream for eight or ten miles, then leaving it and crossing on uneven country the Grande Ronde was reached. The road from Fort Boise to the Grande Ronde was much better than that from Fort Hall to Fort Boise. As it approached the Grande Ronde, sage-brush began to give way to timber.

The Grande Ronde was a large circular basin hemmed in


17. Ibid., pp. 207-211; also Chittenden op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 480-481.
on the north and northwest by the Blue Mountains and on the
east by mountain spurs. Around the base of the mountains were
fine springs of water; grazing was excellent; wood was plen-
tiful and the scenery enchanting. Small wonder that
emigrants often rested there for a few days after the difficult
journey along the Snake in order to gain strength for the
crossing of the steep Blue Mountains ahead.

The ascent of the Blue Mountains was steep and the
descent on the opposite side equally as bad, but wood and
water were abundant. After crossing mountains the trail
followed down the Umatilla River to the Columbia. Taking
the left bank of the Columbia, it passed over extremely
broken and uneven ground, crossing the John Day River and the
Des Chutes River, to the Dalles - a series of falls on the
Columbia which formed a very imposing and attractive sight.
At the foot of the Dalles was the old deserted mission built
by Marcus Whitman. It will be needless to enter into any
extended description of the route of the trail down the
Columbia. It continued down the left bank to the north of
the Willamette River, opposite Fort Vancouver. The crossing
of the Cascade Mountains was the most difficult part of this

section of the trail. Many did not even attempt to take their wagons across, but floated down the river in canoes, rafts, boats, or wagon beds and drove their stock to the end of the trail. From Fort Vancouver the emigrants scattered to the settlements, at least such as had not already left the trail further up the river.

The trail to Oregon having been followed, the various routes to California may now be traced. Mention has been made of the fact that one road led from Fort Bridger, leaving the Oregon Trail there. This route led westward from the fort across the divide into the valley of Bear River. Here the river was "a perfect sluice running down the side of a mountain, the tops of which is covered with snow", consequently very hard to ford. Soon after crossing the Bear River the trail entered Echo Canon, which it followed to Weber River, a stream flowing into Great Salt Lake, north of Salt Lake City. This canon is from twenty-five to thirty miles long. The walls on the northern side rise from 300 to 500 feet. The southern side is a mass of rounded hills covered with soil, or sloping slabs of rock.

Richard F. Burton, the English traveller, thus described the canon in 1860: "Between them (the steep sides) runs the clear, swift, bubbling stream, in a pebbly bed now hugging one, then the other side of the chasm; it has cut its way deeply below the surface; the banks or benches of stiff alluvium are not un-frequently twenty feet high; in places it is partially dammed

20. Langworthy, Scenery of the Plains, Mountains and Mines, p. 79.
by the hand of Nature, and everywhere the watery margin is of the brightest green, and overgrown with grass, nettles, willow thickets, in which the hop is conspicuous, quaking asp and other tall trees." The side walls were cut up by many smaller canons.

Reaching Weber River at the mouth of the canon the road followed down the right bank of the river about four miles, then crossed the stream, which was as rapid and dangerous to cross as the Bear River. It next followed up a small ravine for about six miles, crossed a dividing ridge, and descended by another ravine to East Canon Creek. This stream had to be forded thirteen times in the eight miles along which the road followed it. Leaving East Canon Creek by way of a small ravine leading to the west the road crossed Big Mountain and Little Mountain, the two ridges of the Wasatch range. The route over the mountains was steep and rough. After crossing these mountains it followed down Emigration Canon, another deep narrow gorge, lined with walls of rock, to the plains upon which Salt Lake City is located. This was the old Mormon route. In 1850 a second road turned up Weber River at the

21. The City of the Saints and Across the Rocky Mountains to California, pp. 184-185.

mouth of Echo Canon and after ascending the valley of that stream for about twenty-seven miles turned to the right, following up a ravine. Crossing the divide of the Wasatch the road followed down a frightfully steep and rocky gorge to the plain south of Salt Lake City. In the latter canon, the road crossed the stream thirty-nine times in eight miles. This road was probably in use in 1849 also, for one single narrow road could hardly have accommodated the great number of emigrants.

Salt Lake City is thus described in 1850: "The City is 22 miles South-East of Salt Lake on the Eastern side of the Valley, on a slightly inclined Plain. It is laid out into 19 Wards (the 20th Ward running into a Spur of the Mountains is not included in the Corporation) each Ward is divided into Blocks of 10 Acres each and each Block in 8 Lots of an Acre and a quarter. The Blocks are divided by streets 8 Rods wide and a stream of Spring-water from the mountain is conducted through each street throughout its entire length. The dwelling-houses are built of Adobe or unburned Brick. They are generally plain but neat and comfortable. They have a State-House built of Red Sand which they procure in the neighboring Mountains."

From Salt Lake City the main trail ran around the north end of Great Salt Lake, while Hasting's Cut-Off passed around the south end. The former road ran along the plain of the base of the mountains which form the entire boundary of Salt Lake Valley. At Weber River was the last Mormon settlement - the last house for hundreds of miles. The trail continued along the foot of the mountains to the Bear River, twenty miles from its mouth at the northern end of the lake. After crossing the

Bear River, it made a detour to the northwest to the City of Rocks, across a barren country covered with the customary sage-brush. At the City of Rocks the road joined the California road from the Raft River.

The branch from the mouth of the Raft River to the City of Rocks left the Oregon Trail at the mouth of the river, followed up its course - a level barren plain, except on the immediate banks of the stream - to within a few miles of the City of Rocks. Leaving the river the road started across the divide between the Raft River and Goose Creek, soon reaching the City of Rocks and the road from Salt Lake City.

But there is still another road to join these two. Between the middle of July and the middle of August, 1849, a new route was opened up from Soda Springs on Bear River to a point on Raft River a few miles from the City of Rocks. Hedspeth's


27. Delano found no cut-off on July 14 -Ibid; p. 138 -yet on August 16 it had already been opened - Webster, The Gold Seekers of '49, p. 73.
Cut-Off, as it was called, passed first around a spur of mountains to the northwest, then ran in a southwesterly direction, and finally turned to the west to join the older road at the point where it left chips River. The new road saved considerable distance but was quite rough and there was one stretch of nearly twenty-five miles without water.

The City of Rocks derived its name from the curious rock formations located there. One emigrant says: "A short distance from the junction, are the noted Steeple Rocks, between two of which runs the Fort Hall Road, the pass being barely sufficient to crowd a wagon through. In sight of and near our road, are two tall and sharp pointed columns, two or three hundred feet in apparent height, their forms being regular and beautifully elongated cones. Here are monuments erected by the hand of Nature, rivaling in grandeur Trajan's Pillar, or Cleopatra's Needle." Another, "A mile distant, on the Fort Hall road, there was a singular outcrop of rock, which was a curiosity. There were three points in the shape of sugar loaves, sixty or eighty feet high, and these were surrounded by many lesser ones of the same shape, and I could compare them to nothing else but heathen deities, surrounded by their kneeling worshippers."

From the City of Rocks the trail ascended the Goose Creek Mountains and passed down a small ravine to Goose Creek, a confluence of the Snake. The road over the mountains was

28. Webster, op. cit., pp. 73-75; Wagner, op. cit.
rough and steep and the descent into the valley of Goose Creek was so precipitous that wagon wheels had to be chained or the wagon let down with ropes. From the descent to Goose Creek to the Humboldt River the trail ran to the southwest - a distance of about one hundred miles. The route lay up Goose Creek and through Thousand Spring Valley. The North Fork of the Humboldt is a small stream with a good current and pure water. The valley is lined on both sides with mountains; it is several miles wide except where the mountains crowd in upon the stream. In such places the trail had to cross these spurs. Grass and willows along the stream and sage-brush and greasewood beyond the immediate margin comprised the vegetation. The dust was smothering. After following down the North Fork for a distance of about eight miles the trail reached the junction of the North and South Forks of the Humboldt. There Hasting's Cut-Off united with the main trail.

Hasting's Cut-Off as has been mentioned, passed to the south of Great Salt Lake. The route lay almost directly west from Salt Lake City to the Ruby Mountains, deviations being made only to escape the crossing of mountains. Upon reaching the eastern base of the Ruby Mountains it turned to the left and passed

32. Ibid., pp. 152-161; also Langworthy, op. cit., pp. 125-131.
33. Ibid., p. 161; pp. 165-166; also Langworthy op. cit., p. 131.
around the southern end of the range into the valley of the South Fork of the Humboldt, thence down the stream to its junction with the North Fork. West of Great Salt Lake the road traversed a desert ninety miles wide, in which what little water there was for the most part was too salty to be fit for use. Occasionally sparkling lakes and groves of timber appeared to the thirsty emigrant, only to vanish upon approach—a mirage. Besides being a less desirable road than the one from Salt Lake City to the north of the lake by way of the city of Rocks the cut-off failed to save the emigrant any time for it was a longer route than the northern one.

All the roads to California, over the central route, were thus merged together by the time they reached the junction of the two branches of the Humboldt. For over one hundred and

34. Warren, "Map of the Territory of the United States from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean," Reports of the Explorations and Surveys to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, Vol. IX.


36. Edmundson, op. cit., pp. 527-531, gives the distance from Salt Lake City to the forks of the Humboldt by way of Hastings Cut-Off as about 440 miles. Langworthy, op. cit., pp. 111-113, gives the distance by the northern route as about 370 miles. This is only approximate of course but it agrees with the general opinion of emigrants.
fifty miles, the course of the trail now lay in a westerly direction, following the Humboldt. The river flows in a very serpentine course and the trail struck the immediate banks of the river only at occasional points. Sometimes it did not touch the stream for drives of twenty or thirty miles. In the spring and early summer the river is much broader than it is later in the season, so the road had to follow a higher level than when the waters had receded, later in the season.

Like other desert streams the Humboldt diminishes in size as it progresses and finally disappears in the sand. The water, pure in the upper stretches of the river, becomes more and more alkaline, almost or quite unfit to use. On each side of the valley are mountain ranges. The road plowed through an ashy dust, at least six inches deep in most places, bearing only sage-brush and greasewood. Horace Greeley followed down the Humbold in a stage-coach in 1859. His description hardly gives one a favorable impression. "I thought I had seen barrenness before - on the upper courses of the Republican - on the North Platte, Green River, etc., - but I was green, if the regions washed by those streams were not. Here, on the Humboldt, famine sits enthroned, and waves his scepter over a dominion expressly made for him. On the above-named rivers, I regarded cotton-wood with contempt; here, a belt, even the narrowest fringe, of cotton-wood would make a comparative Eden. The sage-bush and greasewood, which cover

the high, parched plain on either side of the river's bottom, seems thinly set, with broad spaces of naked, shining, glaring, blinding clay between them; the hills beyond, which bound the prospect, seem even more naked. Not a tree, and hardly a shrub, anywhere, relieves the sterility; not a brook, save one small one, runs down between them to swell the scanty waters of the river. After flowing for some two hundred miles in a westerly direction the Humboldt turns to the south. About forty-five miles below the bend, the trail began to branch again. There a road left the river and ran approximately 190 miles to the northwest to Goose Lake, in what is now the extreme northeastern corner of California. The first half of the route led across a series of desert wastes, interspersed with springs—the waters of which was often preferable only to no water at all. The first spring was about fourteen miles from the Humboldt-Antelope Springs, it was too small to supply the needs of great crowds of emigrants. Next came Rabbit Springs, in the middle of a forty mile desert. On the western edge of the desert was a much better place for watering the stock—Black Rock Spring. Mud Lake, about thirty miles beyond, was more marsh than lake in summer. From Mud Lake to the pass of the Sierras, the road ran through a rough country—across hills and through deep ravines. About ten miles east of Goose Lake, the road crossed the Sierras by a pass which was by no means difficult.

From Goose Lake the trail led about twenty miles to the head waters of Pitt River, thence down that stream for a distance of about ninety miles. The valley of the river was well timbered, grass was plentiful, and the water good. The river is lined on either side with mountains. Due to this the road was often rough but it was considered good. Leaving Pitt River, the road ran to the southwest about seventy-five miles to the head waters of the north fork of Feather River, a branch of Pitt River, through a heavily timbered country. After following down Feather River for a few miles it crossed over again to the valley of Pitt River, here called the Sacramento, reaching it near Lassen's Ranch, on the east side of the river at the mouth of Deer Creek. Here a trading post, consisting of two or three adobe buildings, was located. This was the outskirts of civilization, in California and we may consider it as the end of this branch of the trail. This road was commonly known as Greenhorn's Cut-Off, the route being much longer and more difficult, than the southern one. The total distance from the Humboldt to Lassen's Ranch was in the neighborhood of from 465 to 480 miles.

From the bend of the Humboldt the southern route followed down the Humboldt sixty-five miles to the Sink. Just about where the waters finally disappear into the desert in a shallow lake, about twenty miles long by ten miles wide, surrounded

41. Webster, op. cit., p. 95, says 466 miles, Delano op. cit., pp. 180-233, computes it at 479 miles.
42. Delano, op. cit., p. 179.
by a morass covered with coarse grass and rushes. At the southern end of the lake the road branched once more. The more northerly of the two branches led across a desert of over fifty miles to the Salmon Trout or Truckee River, thence up that stream, across the Sierra Nevadas and down Bear River, a small tributary of the Sacramento. The importance of this route does not merit any more detailed description.

The more southerly branch from the Sink of the Humboldt crossed a desert to the Carson River, forty miles to the south. This was probably the most fatal of all the deserts crossed anywhere by any of the branches of the trail. This was largely due to its position near the end of the trail; animals were already in very poor condition when they reached it. For about one hundred miles the road followed up the valley of the Carson River. This valley afforded an admissible opportunity for the emigrants to recruit their stock, it being well supplied with fine grass and water. On the upper course of the stream, the road followed a narrow union up the Sierras. Leaving the stream the road passed over a chain of hills, heavily timbered with pine, cedar and fir, to a small body of water, known as Red Lake. Just beyond lay the dividing ridge of the Sierras. Langworthy thus describes this difficult ascent:

"After refreshing ourselves and team at the lake, we clambered up an ascent about two miles, which is the most dreaded by emigrants of any upon the entire land route to California. The road is crooked, taking numerous short turns around the roots of heavy trees, and in some places, is paved over with large roundish rocks. Up and over these, the cattle are compelled to climb, sometimes slipping down and in other instances, creeping upwards upon their knees. Fortunately we had no load at this time, and we found an empty wagon quite sufficient for three yoke of oxen to draw. In some parts of this ascent, we kept upon the summit of a narrow ridge, on either side of which is a deep canon, into which, by a little mismanagement, the team and carriage might easily be hurled in instant destruction.

"After gaining this giddy height, we found a little level ground and then descended into another valley lying between the two main chains of these mountains. Here is a lake of considerable extent, irregular in form, and sprinkled with numerous little inlands, green and overgrown with moss.

"Took an early breakfast, and moved forward, leaving the lake at its south-western extremity, and soon commenced the ascent of the western ridge, the loftiest chain in all these ranges of mountains. We regarded it as the last and most formidable barrier we have to surmount, in arriving at the half fabulous region of untold wealth. The last ascent is six miles; the first three, through dense forests of ever-green, timber, the remaining three miles the mountain is mostly bare, except here and there a scattering tree. The last two miles of the ascent is terrific, being excessively steep, and a part of
the way so sideling, that it was necessary for several men
to brace themselves against a wagon to prevent its upsetting
and rolling down the side of the mountain. By doubling teams
and assisting with manual strength, we succeeded in gaining
the top of this dreaded eminence by two o'clock in the after-
noon. 45

The descent on the western side was less steep and
abrupt. For about a hundred miles, the road ran westward
through forests of huge pine and cedar trees to Placerville,
known also as "Hangtown," on a branch of the south fork of
American River, the end of the trail. From the bend of the
Humboldt, where the northern road branched off, to Placerville,
the distance was in the neighborhood of from 310 to 325 miles. 46

Besides these natural obstacles, which the emigrants had
to meet and overcome, there were the Indians, who certainly
must be taken into consideration. Yet they should not be
given undue consideration. They were but one of the minor
trials which the emigrants had to endure. Disease was much
more fatal; mud, dust-choking, blinding and smothering—, alkali
water, swift streams that must be crossed, heat from which there
was no escape, mosquitoes which none could elude— as certain
as an emigrant crossed the trail these things had to be met.
The great majority suffered little if any from Indian depreda-
tions. It would probably not be untrue to state that in the
period 1849-1860, the emigrant blood spilled by Indians was less

45. Ibid., pp. 161-163.
46. Estimated distances from the beginning of the desert
between the Humboldt and the Carson River to Placerville range
from 244 to 260 miles. See Langworthy, op. cit., pp. 146-175,
than the amount imbibed by mosquitoes.

The only Indian tribe of any importance to be encountered east of Fort Kearney was the Pawnee, along the north side of the Platte. Begging and petty thievery were the chief faults of these Indians. The Pawnees ranged for some distance to the west of the fort also and often crossed to the south side of the Platte. West of the Pawnees were Sioux tribes. Between the north and south forks of the Platte roamed the Oglala band. They were more warlike than their neighbors to the east though they seldom bothered any considerable party of emigrants. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes were located in the vicinity of Fort Laramie. These were Algonquins not Sioux.

West of the Rocky Mountains the great Shoshonean family reached from what is now Idaho and southern Oregon to Southern California. That part of the family in the region of the Green and Bear Rivers went by the names of Snakes; they caused the emigrants no trouble. Another branch of the family, the Bannocks of what is now southern Idaho and eastern Oregon, was more troublesome. To the north of them, in the present states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington, a number of related tribes of the Shahapont family, the Klickitats, NezPerces,

50 Delano, op. cit., p. 142.
Umatillas, Yakimas, Wallawallas and Paloooses, frequently went on the war path, besides continually resorting to theft.

But the most constant and troublesome offenders were the Indians along the route from the City of Rocks to the ends of the trail in California. The Indians of California were of many different tribes. Those to the east of what is now the eastern boundary of California belonged to the Shoshonean family. Among other names given them was that of Paiute. The characteristics of the California Indians encountered by the emigrants and those to the east along the Humboldt were much the same, however, and to the emigrants they most frequently went by the name of Root Diggers, or simply Diggers. This name was given because of the fact that a large part of their food consisted of edible roots. They continually harassed the emigrants - stealing cattle or shooting them so that they had to be left behind, food for the slayers, picking off single individuals, or small parties who strayed too far from a protecting company keeping signal fires burning on the mountains, thus keeping the travellers in a continuous state of apprehension and otherwise making life uncomfortable. If attacked, they would flee to the mountains, where to attack was fruitless if not absolute folly. The Diggers probably caused the emigrants more grief than all the other Indians together.

51 Hodge, op. cit., Pt. II, pp. 519-520.
Chapter V

TRIALS OF THE EMIGRANT AND THE GOLD-SEEKER

During the earlier years of the period 1849-1860 the emigrant and the gold-seeker almost monopolized the California and Oregon Trail. Mail and freight service were in their infancy. The years 1849-1854 may be well portrayed by a study of the fortune hunters and the emigrants. Further unity is lent to such a period by the fact that, with a few minor exceptions, the route of the trail as established by the end of 1849 remained the same throughout the ensuing five years. The period of the late fifties saw the emigrant sharing the trail with stage-coaches and long trains of freight wagons. New routes were opened and old ones improved. It is of the earlier years that this chapter proposes to deal.

Some idea of the extent of the migration over the trail is essential to an understanding of many of the conditions and problems which had to be met. It is not the purpose of this work to go into any detail as to why people followed the trail to the west or what they did upon their arrival but to present the trail itself. It is well known that the lure of the gold diggings drew great hordes to California in the year 1849 and those immediately following. After the gold rush was over emigrants continued to go to the Golden State in order to develop her more homely, though not less valuable, resources. Cheap land served to attract the majority of the settlers of Oregon Territory; religious motives, re-inforced by the vision of a garden of Eden in the midst of the desert, impelled the Mormon converts to make the long journey to the region of great Salt Lake.  

1Meeker, Ventures and Adventures of Ezra Meeker or Sixty Years of Frontier Life, p.40.
Any statement of the number of people following the trail can be no more than a rough approximation, yet some such statement is necessary. On June 10, 1849, Major Cross estimated that there were about 20,000 people and 50,000 head of stock ahead of him, beyond the forks of the Platte. At Fort Kearny, where a count was made, he learned that 4,000 wagons had preceded him on the south side of the Platte alone. Those on the north side could not be counted from the fort. A line of wagons extended up and down the river as far as he could see.  

In the fifteen days, May 21 to June 5, about 3,700 wagons passed Fort Kearny. At four people to the wagon this would mean nearly 15,000 people. By June 22 over 5,500 wagons had passed. Very few people - about 400 - went to Oregon. Over 2,000 converts to Mormonism left England for Salt Lake City. Of course these were not the only Mormons to cross the plains in 1849. The great majority of the migration went to California. The number taking the northern route, by way of Goose Lake, was estimated at from 7,000 to 9,000.  

Linn, op cit., p. 416.  
The emigration of 1850 was probably larger even than that of 1849. By July 8, at Fort Laramie, 37,570 men, 825 Women, 1,126 children, 9,101 wagons, 31,502 oxen, 22,873 horses, 7,650 mules and 5,754 cows were registered. Some 2,470 persons had hurried by without registering. Langworthy reports, June 21st, at the upper crossing of the Platte, "We are now upon the main road over which all emigrants must pass, whether bound for Oregon or California. It is nearly a continuous, unbroken procession. We pass the ferrying-place, leaving it three miles to the left. We learn that seven thousand teams have already crossed this ferry the present season. Thousands have crossed at various points below, and other thousands are now passing who do not cross the river at all." Some 2,000 of the emigrants went to Oregon. The remainder went to California and Utah, the great majority of course to the former place.

9Scenery of the Plains, Mountains and Mines, pp.66-67.
10Young, op. cit., p. 370.
The emigration to California fell off greatly in 1851, though the Oregon and Utah emigrants were as numerous as before. However, in 1852 the tide rose again and the trail was crowded. Over 23,000 people and 59,000 cattle passed Fort Kearney; 12 probably as many passed on the north side of the river, one emigrant estimated the total at 50,000. J. H. Holeman, Indian agent in Utah, travelling up the Humboldt, passed an average of about 300 wagons a day for a distance of 400 miles. Emigration to Oregon was the highest since 1847.

The emigration of 1853 was not so great as that of the previous year, yet 3,700 wagons, 105,000 cattle and 15,000 people passed Fort Kearney. Many followed the north bank of the Platte as usual and so are not included in this count. Kanesville was crowded with people in May and the river banks about the farris on the Missouri, the Elkhorn and the Loup. Fort were crowded with people waiting to pass.

12 Ibid., Vol VIII, p. 65.
13 Meeker, op. cit., p. 65.
15 Young, op. cit., p. 370.
16 McMaster, op. cit., Vol VIII, p. 66.
cross. 17. No very definite estimate can be made for the following year. The governor of California placed the overland emigration for that year at over 61,000, but that included those who came by the southern route as well, and moreover too much reliance should not be placed on such figures. Probably the emigration of 1854 fell off little, if any, from that of 1853. Little more can be said.

In order to gain an adequate conception of the conditions confronting the emigrant we must be able to see the movement across the plains as a whole, yet not lose sight of the individuals. Without an understanding of the magnitude of the movement the details cannot be rightly understood; without some understanding of the details the story is colorless. To appreciate the conditions which the emigrants faced we must follow them in their journey from east to west.

From all over the East and the Middle west the crowds gathered at the outfitting towns along the Missouri. They come overland in covered wagons, or on steamboats, or partly by rail and partly by steamboat. In some cases, during the gold

17 J. A. MacMurphy, "Thirty-three years ago;"


rush, special trains were run for the emigrants. Many bought wagons and supplies at St. Louis and steamers carrying emigrants up the Missouri were loaded with wagons, mules, oxen and supplies, as well as with men. In the spring of the year, before the grass was long enough to furnish food for the animals, the outfitting towns were crowded with emigrants. Hotels were full to overflowing and often all available company space around the city was occupied.

At the outfitting towns the emigrants, if they had not already done so, bought their covered wagons, oxen, horses, cattle or mules, and supplies. Tents and firearms accompanied practically every party. The superfluous articles can better be described later—when they will be more exposed to view. The great majority of the wagons were drawn by oxen. On a long journey they held out better than horses, though they could not be driven much over sixteen miles a day on the average with safety, while horses could be driven from twenty to twenty-five. Some companies took no wagons at all but packed their supplies on pack-mules.


and either walked or rode horses themselves.\textsuperscript{21} At the outfitting towns also the emigrants formed into companies, varying in number from a score or so to a hundred and fifty or more. Some of these were highly organized with a captain, lieutenants and other officers.\textsuperscript{22} The gullible did not lack for sharpers to relieve them of their money. At Kanesville the Mormons sold worthless guide books and goggles made from common window glass, the former at from fifty cents to two dollars a copy and the latter at fifty cents a pair, to all whom they could persuade that those articles were indispensable on an overland journey.\textsuperscript{23}

Soon after the trains were on their way across the plains the companies which had been so carefully organized on the frontier began to break up. Some wanted to go faster than others and soon left the slower members behind. Many of the companies consisted of heterogenous groups which quarreled among themselves and forced the companies to disband. Many large parties were forced to split up in order to secure grass for their stock. A company place

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21}Webster, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 36-38.
  \item \textsuperscript{22}Delano, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 23; also Langworthy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{23}Langworthy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 19.
\end{itemize}
might have sufficient grass for a small party but not enough for a large one. By the time south pass was reached most of the large companies had broken up into smaller groups or disbanded entirely.24 By 1852 the emigrants had begun to learn the lesson and over half of them joined no organized company, though small parties usually banded together from time to time. In fact there was one great train, some five hundred miles long and one wagon was seldom or never out of sight of others.25

The problem of crossing the numerous rivers and streams was one which occasioned considerable work and difficulty, and often delay. At Kanesville there were a number of ferries yet emigrants often had to wait several days before their turn came to cross. They sometimes had to do the work of pulling the boat or scow back and forth themselves, by the means of ropes fastened


on the banks of the stream. The cattle and other animals were forced to swim. In 1852 a steamboat, ferred wagons across the river during a part of the season, carrying a dozen or more at a time. Across the smaller streams bridges of brush were often built when they were too high to ford. The following extract shows another exigency which had to be met.

"Started at 8 o'clock and went 11 miles to the Ferry on the Loup Fork. The ferrymen were gone and the boat sunk. We attempted to raise it but found it so much damaged as to be unfit for use. We then took the road up the Loup Fork to the Fork which is 48 miles from the Ferry."

A party which arrived opposite Fort Laramie June 13, 1850, found that the ferry boat had been sunk a few days previous by some Californians who were on a spree. Rather than risk a crossing they followed the north bank of the Platte to the upper crossing near the

26 Thissell, Crossing the Plains in '49, p. 21.
27 Meeker, op. cit., p. 62.
Many met this emergency by using their wagon beds as ferry-boats. The stream was about sixteen feet deep and was very swift, the result was that six men drowned within a day or so. The expense of ferrying was not inconsiderable. Major Cross reports that his expedition paid $4.00 per wagon at the Mormon ferry on the upper crossing of the Platte. Langworthy reports five ferryboats operating at that crossing in 1850. In the same year the price for ferrying at Green River, on Sublette's route, was $7.00 per wagon.

Emigrants of 1853 found that a Mormon had built a bridge across Thomas' Fork of Bear River at the only available fording place in the vicinity. For the privilege of crossing he collected seventy-five cents per team and wagon. At the next stream they found a bridge at the only available fording place which reached only about two-thirds of the way across the stream. The toll there was only twenty-


30 Langworthy, op. cit., p. 55.


five cents per wagon—but that was hardly paid "for service rendered."

Some of the emigrants to Oregon listened to the ferryman's story of better grass on the north side of the Snake and crossed the river some distance below. American Falls at $2.50 per wagon. At Ford Roise they had to recross—at $8.00 per wagon.

By far the most fatal of all perils encountered was the cholera, which ravaged the plains from the Missouri to the Rockies in 1849 and the early fifties. One estimate places the number of deaths in 1849 at 2,000, another places those of 1852 at 5,000. The latter is probably too high but it illustrates the terrible mortality. "In the Fifties the Asiatic Cholera crawled in upon the Plains, and like a gray wolf followed the wagon-trains from the 'River' to the Rockies. In the height of the migration, from 4,000 to 5,000 immigrants died of this pestilence; and if there was a half-mile which the Indians had failed to punctuate with a grave, the cholera took care to remedy it."

D. B. Ward, "Across the Plains in 1853,"


Meeker, op. cit., p. 67.
the omission. With the exception of the fact that the Indians are probably credited with too many scalps this is a vivid picture of the destruction wrought by the dreaded disease.

At St. Louis, at the outfitting towns in Western Missouri, and on the steamboats the cholera wrought fearful havoc. In May 1849, one steamer was abandoned and left tied to the shore of the Missouri River. From Missouri to the region of the Sweetwater strong men succumbed to its fearful attacks. A few hours after being attacked they would be resting in a shallow grave by the roadside—probably to be dug up by the wolves as soon as darkness settled over the prairie. Those in the vanguard escaped the work of the scourge. Those who followed the north bank of the Platte suffered much less than their neighbors across the

38 Report of Major Cross, op. cit., p. 128.
39 Delano, op. cit., p. 112.
river, yet even on that side in 1852 a train of eleven wagons was met returning to the states in charge of women all the men having been stricken down by the cholera. After the higher attitudes beyond Fort Laramie were reached the disease gradually become less prevalent and after reaching the Sweetwater comparatively little trace of it remained.

Something must be said of the buffaloes. Great herds of them ranged the plains from Fort Kearney to South Pass. The emigrants on the south side of the Platte usually met their first herd a short distance beyond Fort Kearney. Those on the north bank oftewn met them before passing the fort. By the early fifties the buffaloes beyond the pass were very few. The first attempt of the uninitiated to bring some buffalo steak to camp usually resulted in a waste of bullets. If the hunter did manage to get within range the chances were that upon being shot the animal destined to serve as

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40 Langworthy, op. cit., pp. 70-71, also Paxson, op. cit., p. 166.
41 Meeker, op. cit., p. 68.
42 Delano, op. cit., p. 114.
provender for the hunter and his hungry comrades would go lumbering off across the prairie—for a buffalo must not only be shot but must be shot in the right place before he will fall. The great crowds of emigrants served to make the buffaloes shy and they kept away from the banks of the river except to come for water. The first trains of the year often were detained by great herds crossing their path. 43

Another trial of the traveller was the rain. The journey across the plains was made in the rainy season. The spring of 1849 was a particularly wet one. In the thirty-three days occupied on the journey from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Laramie in May and June Major Cross reports fourteen days in which it rained at least part of the time. 44 This made the road bad, especially between the Missouri outfitting towns and Fort Kearney. In the early days of the trip the emigrants cursed the rain and mud, after that they choked in the dust and prayed for rain. An Oregon emigrant of 1851


tells of a terrible storm of three days duration encountered at Fort Kearny, then closes with the remark "After this rain, we had no more rain until we got to Oregon!" The rains filled the streams which were ordinarily forded to overflowing, forcing the emigrants to resort to improvised bridges and ferries.

To those accustomed to life in the states the storms of the plains were remarkable in their severity. Such account as the following are common. "During the night we were visited by a tremendous tempest, such an one as no person in our company had ever seen previously. The storm raged with unceasing fury, from ten at night until four in the morning—six long hours. The heavens seemed on fire, so continuous was the lightning's blaze. Crashes of thunder followed each other in quick succession, shaking the earth and rolling in terrific grandeur over the boundless plain. The elements were all in arms, and seemed waging a war of unsparing vengeance against all who were exposed to their attack. Both rain


46 Ibid., p.211.
and hail fell in frightful quantities. A mixture of icy pebbles and water, at one time covered the ground to a depth of six inches. The winds blew a perfect hurricane, and every tent was blown down."
The men were forced to take to the covered wagons when the tents blew down. Through it all the sentinels guarded the stock-singing out "two o'clock and all is wet!".

These storms often did more than merely beat down the tents and force their occupants to the wagons. They often caused the cattle or oxen to stampede and scatter over the prairie. On the night of May 29, 1849, a terrible storm broke upon the encamped emigrants near the forks of the Platte. Hundreds of cattle were lost, many of which were never recovered. Some parties lost half their animals, others had only one or two yoke left. Some spent several days searching for their lost stock—sometimes finding them twenty or thirty miles off the road.

About two weeks later another such storm visited the region.

49 Report of Major Cross, op. cit., p. 149.
An exciting event in the life of those following the trail was a stampede. Sometimes the cattle or oxen would become frightened at night and suddenly go thundering along the river or across the prairie, stopping for nothing while the panic swayed them. One herd of some two hundred head of oxen stampeded along the Platte one night and were found the next day six or eight miles down the river, on an island in the middle of the stream.50 Worse than this was a stampede during the day, when the oxen were yoked to the wagons. If the drivers tried to stop them while they were on the run they would turn short, upset the wagon and probably break their own necks, to say nothing of imperiling the lives of those in the wagons. The only way to manage a stampede was just to let the oxen run until they stopped of their own accord—which they usually did in a very few minutes. Then they would run in a straight line and little damage would result.51

50 Bangworthy, op. cit., p. 41.

Like the rain, the dust was a respecter of none. It also was one of the common things which made life disagreeable for the emigrant. None could escape it; few fail to mention it when recording their experiences. When the Platte was left behind the dust began. On the Sweetwater, on Sublette's Cut-Off, on Bear River, on the Snake, along the Humboldt it was a frequent if not continual irritation. On the Sweetwater Major Cross found it so thick that at times it hid his whole command. On the Snake with the hot sun beating down, "We continued the march during the day through dust half-leg deep, for we had now struck a soil that was so light and spongy as to make it dangerous sometimes when riding over it." Crossing Sublette's Cut-Off, Delano thus described the last ten miles. "For about ten miles before reaching the river, the country became broken, and we passed several hard hills. There had been no rain here; consequently the dust was ankle deep. The wind blew

53 Ibid., p. 192.
a gale, and the impalpable powder filled our eyes and nostrils, and our faces, hair, and clothes looked as if we had been rolling in a heap of dry ashed. Even respiration was difficult." Usually there was a strong wind blowing from the west along the Humboldt and the emigrants had to literally eat, drink and breathe the dust which the wagons made by cutting up the parched earth.55

Describing conditions near South Pass Meeker draws the following picture: "The dust has been spoken of as intolerable. The word hany expresses the situation, in fact, the English language contains no words to properly express it. Here was a moving mass of humanity and dumb brutes, at times mixed in extricable confusion, a hundred feet wide or more. Sometimes two columns of wagons traveling on parallel lines and near each other would serve as a barrier to prevent loose stock from crossing; but usually there would be a confused mass of cows, young cattle, horses, and footmen moving along the outskirts. Here and there would be the drivers of loose stock, some on foot and some on horseback.

55 I Bid., p. 166.
Over all, in calm weather at times, the dust would settle so thick that the lead team of oxen could not be seen from the wagon-like a London fog, so thick one might almost cut it. Then, again, that steady flow of wind up to and through the South Pass would hurl the dust and sand in one's face sometimes with force enough to sting from the impact upon the face and hands.\(^{56}\)

If an emigrant escaped the cholera, crossed all the rivers in safety, if he was beyond the muddy region and a fortunate shower had laid the dust for a time, still the varacious mosquitoes hovered about to prey upon him. On the Big Blue, according to one account, they sang tenor at night while the wolves accompanied them with a blood-curdling baritone.\(^{57}\) According to another they went over forty bushels to the acre in the vicinity of Fort Kearny.\(^{58}\) If we are to believe an emigrant of 1850 the mosquitoes on the Humboldt were so thick and so large as to actually shut off the rays of the sun.\(^{59}\) He probably could have


\(^{57}\)Kanderdine, A California Tramp and Later Footprints, p.21.

\(^{58}\)Webster, op.cit., p.51.

\(^{59}\)Stewart, op.cit., p. 183.
overlooked that little inconvenience had not the creatures descended to more grievous sin. Some travellers could hardly find words to express the torment which the pests inflicted. Yet the words of one man, written near Fort Hall, speaks volumes - "Oh, God! The mosquitoes."\(^{60}\)

For fuel to cook their bacon, beans and fresh meat and to bake their yellow soda biscuits or bread the emigrants used wood when available and buffalo chips, dry weeds, sage-brush or the wood from deserted wagons at other times. Lack of fuel caused many a man to eat a cold meal, or to crawl to bed supperless.

Of much greater concern was the death of grass and good water. Much of the water along the route was highly impregnated with alkali and almost unfit for use. The comparatively small bodies of emigrants who crossed the plains and mountains prior to 1849 fared much better in securing grass than those of later years. When oxen and cattle began to follow the trail by the

\(^{60}\) Prosch, _op.cit._, p.56.
tens of thousands the problem of sustenance became a vital one. Those who left the frontier early in the spring might have to feed their stock on grain for a short time until the grass grew up, but after that they had a great advantage over the majority of the season's emigration. After a few thousand head of stock had passed the grass became very scarce and parties were found very often to drive their animals a considerable distance off the road for feed. If a particularly favorable camping site was found a company would occasionally lay over for a day or two so as to rest and recuperate their stock.

The three most frequently mentioned articles in an emigrant's journal or diary are water, grass and fuel. When nothing better was available the emigrants had to drink out of mud puddles, buffalo wallows or whatever happened to be at hand. One exclaims, "Many a drink of water did I take that I would not have washed in at home." Another relates, "This forenoon we filled our water casks with what we knew to be the leachings off from the putrid

61 Dutton, op. cit. p.460.
carcasses of dead horses, mules, and oxen."62 At Rabbit Springs, on the northern road to California, in 1849 the migration was too heavy and the water so scarce that men stood in line with tin cups and dipped the muddy water up as it slowly trickled into the bottom of the shallow wells which had been dug. Water for the stock was often out of the question there.63 In the middle of the desert between the Humboldt and Carson Rivers water sold for $1.00 a gallon in 1850.64

The effect of poor and insufficient water and lack of grass became very evident long before the end of the trail came in sight. The course of the trail was marked with the skeletons and the dead bodies of cattle, oxen and horses, with abandoned property, and with wagons and the ruins of wagons left behind because they could be drawn no further.

It was in the vicinity of Fort Laramie that the death of stock, the abandonment of property and the destruction of wagons began to occur on a large scale. After the major portion of the

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62 Harlan, op.cit., p.57.
63 Delano, op.cit., p.181.
64 Stewart, op.cit., p.184.
emigration of 1849 had passed the fort all the camp
grounds in the neighborhood were strewn with clothing,
bacon, pork, beans, provisions of almost all kinds,
and iron—the remains of wagons which had been burned. 65
Beyond the upper crossing of the Platte dead cattle
came to be a common sight. Between the Platte and the
Sweetwater Major Cross observed at least fifty in a dis­
tance of twenty-two miles. 66 Along the Sweetwater
many wagons were broken up and the supplies, such as were
not thrown away, packed on the animals. Fine trunks,
boxes and barrels fed the flames. Property valued at
$100—in the States—was none to good to warm the chilly
owner in the evening. Dead stock was common. 67

About South Pass the number of dead
cattle increased, due probably to the high altitude, lack
of grass in the immediate vicinity and hard work. An
emigrant of 1850 estimated that there were a hundred
carcasses within a mile surrounding Pacific Springs. 68

Beyond the pass such death and destruc­
tion continued on all the various branches of the trail.

65 Webster, op. cit., p. 58.
67 Langworthy, op. cit., p. 71.
68 Harlan, op. cit., p. 48.
Oregon emigrants had to throw away all superfluous articles, cut off part of their wagon-bed to make it lighter and to leave some of their faithful oxen lying along the road to die, when they could go no further. Along Goose Creek and thence along the road to the Humboldt were abandoned wagons, logs chains, irons bars, and other property.\(^6\)\(^9\) An Hastings Cut-Off in 1849 Stansbury found abandoned wagons, great quantities of good clothing, trunks, books, tool-chests and other articles, both useful and otherwise.\(^7\)\(^1\) Many animals perished on the barren stretches between the Humboldt and Goose Lake, on the northern road to California.\(^7\)\(^2\)

But death and destruction were at their worst on the forty miles of desert between the Sink of the Humboldt and Carson River. This was the last straw for many a poor beast, already worn out by the previous hardship. An emigrant of 1850 states that the number of dead horses, mules, and oxen in the forty

\(^6\) Prosch, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-59.
\(^7\) Delano, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
miles was estimated at 5,000 head.73 Another emigrant of that year states that dead animals were so numerous that he had counted fifty within a distance of forty rods.74 The putrifying carcasses made travelling very unpleasant and furnished breeding places for disease germs. As illustrative of the immense number of animals which perished on the desert the experience of a small party of travellers in 1855 may prove helpful. Crossing at night when it was so dark that they could not see the road they kept on the beaten tracks by following the trail of bones and by listening to the sound of their horses' hoofs on the hard-beaten track.75

But abandoned wagons and property also lined the road across the desert, besides being scattered profusely at the points where the road entered and left it. An emigrant of 1850 estimated that there was an average of thirty abandoned wagons to the mile across the desert—a total of 1,200. Along the Carson River at the point where

73Edmundson, op.cit., p.533.
74Langworthy, op.cit., p.148.
the road left the desert were an additional 2,000
within a space of six miles. Not over one-fourth of the
wagons that started for California would ever cross the
mountains he believed. 76 Many of the emigrants were
forced to abandon their wagons after crossing a part of the
desert, to drive their stock on to the Carson River for
food and water, and then return and take the wagons the
remainder of the distance.77

Langworthy gives an excellent picture of the
property and supplies which were thrown overboard. "The
Desert from side to side, is strewn with goods of every
name. The following articles however, are peculiarly
abundant; log-chains, wagons, and wagon irons, iron
bound water-casks, cooking implements, all kinds of dishes
and hollow ware, cooking stoves and utensils, boots and
shoes, and clothing of all kinds, even life preservers,
trunks and boxes, tin-bakers, books, guns, pistols, gun-
locks and barrels. Edged tools, planes, augers and chisels,

76 Harlan, op. cit., pp. 58-60.
77 Dutton, op. cit., p. 473.
mill and cross-cut saws, good geese feathers in heaps, or blowing over the Desert, feather beds, canvass tents, and wagon covers." Speaking of the point where the road first touched the Carson after leaving the desert he continues:

This point, on the river, bears the classic name of 'Ragtown'. The reason of the appellation, is because there are several acres here, literally covered with rags, or clothing, either sound or tattered. The word-work of thousands of wagons have been burnt at this place; the irons covered the soil for a considerable space around. 78

The Indians of the plains were of comparatively little trouble to the emigrants in the period 1849-1854 except for their habits of stealing and begging. The whites brought many of the Indian depredations upon themselves by shooting at the Indians to try their marksmanship or the range of their guns. 79 Some seemed to think no more about shooting an Indian than a wolf or coyote. The most notable encounter of the period took place near Fort Laramie in August, 1854. An Indian killed an ox belonging to a Mormon emigrant. A party of soldiers

was sent out from the fort under an inexperienced young lieutenant to arrest the offending Indian and those who had eaten the animal. A fight ensued in which the lieutenant and his entire party of thirty men, with the exception of one, were slain.\textsuperscript{80} The Indians were also hostile along the trail in Oregon in 1854, attaching and burning trains.\textsuperscript{81}

The Indians along the Humboldt were very troublesome in 1849, 1850 and 1851, as well as along the Carson. They hid in the willows or crept upon the emigrants in the dark, shooting and stealing all the oxen they could and occasionally shooting an emigrant if they could do so with little risk to themselves. If pursued they would take to the mountains and trying to catch them was "very much like running down grayhounds with Bull dogs."\textsuperscript{82} During the year 1852 these Indians were not so troublesome. A trip of Indian agent J. H. Holeman down the Humboldt in the spring probably

\textsuperscript{80} C\textit{ou}t\textit{ant}, \textit{History of Wyoming}, Vol. I, pp 322-323.


\textsuperscript{82} Harlan, \textit{op. cit.}, p.55.
pacified them somewhat. The Indians along Pitt River, in Northern California, caused considerable trouble. Their tactics were the same as those of the Diggers along the Humboldt.

Many emigrants were sorely in need of relief long before they reached California. Although piles of food were thrown away in the earlier stages of the journey, by the time the Humboldt was reached food was in demand. In 1850 in particular many emigrants had heard that too much food had been carried in the previous year so they went to the other extreme and many ran out of supplies. Such conditions called for measures of relief.

In 1849 there was no organized effort by the people of California for the relief of the needy. The head of the Pacific Division of the United States Army, Major General P. F. Smith, took up the matter and put Brevet Major D. H. Rucker in charge of relief.

84 Delano, op. cit., pp. 211, 239-240.
85 I. bid., p. 236.
About the middle of September aid was sent to those on the northern route and on the Truckee route. Few emigrants travelled the latter course in 1849 so the relief parties went to the Carson River route, where the need was much greater. Further aid was sent to the emigrants on this route in October. The chief difficulty was not lack of food but lack of means of transportation. Aid was provided in the form of fresh animals and food where necessary. On the northern route many people suffered from scurvy. Indians drove off their cattle. When they reached the river valleys where grass was good they were loath to travel fast or to leave any of their wagons or property behind. Most of them were finally herded safely to the region of Lassens trading post but a few got caught in snowstorms.

In the following years organized relief was furnished by the people of California. At Ragtown, on the Carson, in 1850, emigrants found an abundant

86Senate Executive Documents, 31st Cong., 1 sess., Vol. XIII, Doc. 52, Ser. no. 561., pp 96-152.
supply of flour sent by the Benevolent Society of Sacramento City. To those with money the agent sold the flour at twenty-five cents a pound. To those who were destitute of money he gave twenty pounds of flour each. State authorities furnished it in lesser quantities. That from Sacramento probably did not last long at the rate it was given away. In 1852 state officers were stationed near the Sink of the Humboldt to give away flour and other supplies to the needy and other were stationed on the Carson River for the same purposes.

Beginning with 1850 traders made their way into the Carson valley and the desert. Some bought up the tired and worn-out oxen of the emigrants, fattened them up along the Carson, and drove them to California where they commanded a good price. In 1850 a tired ox would sell for from $1.00 to $8.00. A meal at one of the trading posts cost $5.00. A man might sell what remained of the oxen which had carried him from the Missouri and not secure enough for a good meal.

87 Langwroty, op. cit., p. 149.
88 Delano, op. cit., p. 239.
89 Paxson, Turnbull's Travels from the United States across the Plains to California, p. 205.
90 Harlan, op. cit., p. 58.
In 1852 there were several stations in the desert between the Humboldt and the Carson where water and liquor were sold. The latter ranged in price from seventy-five to twenty-five cents a drink according to quality. Trading stations were located all along the Carson. Prices were considerably lower than in 1850, but still very high.91

(The journey across the continent was not entirely a life of trials and hardships. There were pleasant days with beautiful scenery and an exhilarating atmosphere. But the days spent on the trail were predominantly days of toil and tribulation. If there was not rain and mud there was dust or mosquitoes, or both. In the mountains they were chilled to the bone at night and had to march under a burning sun at noon. If the irritations were more or less petty they were continuous and harrowing.)

91Paxson, op.cit., pp. 206-212.
Chapter VI.

MAIL, PONY EXPRESS AND FREIGHT

With the settlement of the Far West and the establishment of army posts along the trail, there arose a necessity for communication between East and West and for the transportation of supplies. The result was the establishment of mail, express and telegraph service, and of great trains of freight wagons. Like the emigrants, these for the most part followed the great central route to the West.

The first mail service was established in 1850, between Independence and Salt Lake City. Monthly trips were made beginning on July 1. From Salt Lake City, the service was soon extended to Sacramento, California. By 1856 the mail contract had fallen into the hands of the Mormons, but it was taken from them in 1857, during the Mormon war, of which more will be said later. During that trouble a weekly mail was instituted in order that more regular communication might be maintained between the government and the troops in Utah. The time required to carry the mail from St. Joseph to


2. Burton, The City of the Saints and Across the Rocky Mountains to California, p. 4
3. Placerville was thirty-eight days. After the trouble with the Mormons was over, this service on June 30, 1859, was cut down to semi-monthly trips. In May of that year, the contract was taken by the freighting firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell.

For many years the service was irregular and uncertain. The road was difficult in winter. The mail was frequently from two to four months late. Due partly to this and partly to the strength of the South in Congress the main overland route was transferred to the Southwest in 1858. On September 15, of that year the Butterfield Southern Overland Mail began carrying mail from St. Louis to San Francisco via Little Rock, El Paso, Yuma and Los Angeles.

6. Burton, op. cit., p. 4
8. Ibid., pp., 986-990; Lummis, op. cit., p. 84.
While the Butterfield line was in operation only local mail was carried by the central route. In 1860 the cost of carrying the mail over the St. Joseph, Salt Lake City and Placerville route was over $200,000 and the receipts a little over $5,000.9

The mail was usually carried in stage coaches drawn by mules. Passengers were carried in the coaches along with the mail. At first the only stations where mules were changed were Fort Kearny, Fort Laramie and Fort Bridger, on the line from Missouri to Salt Lake City. The first regular stage from Salt Lake City to California was established in the summer of 1858. Major George Charpenning secured a control in May of that year to transport mail and passengers, the passenger fare being $120 and the contractor receiving $130,000 annually. In March, 1860, this line was taken over by Russell, Majors and Waddell, who, it will be remembered, had taken over the St. Joseph-Salt Lake City line the previous year. On June 1, 1860, the stage from Salt Lake City to California was discontinued and the mail carried on mules.11

Between St. Joseph—commonly called St. Joe—and Salt Lake City, there were forty-five stations in 1860, where mules were changed and where the passengers ate or slept. The schedule time was twenty-one days and the stage-coaches seldom made it in less than nineteen, though they could have done so.

11. Ibid., p. 511.
12. Ibid., p. 511.
The reason given for not driving more rapidly in summer was that the people of Salt Lake City would thus be led to expect as prompt mail service in winter, when the condition of the road rendered this impossible, as in summer. According to Horace Greeley at least sixteen of the seventeen mail bags in the coach in which he rode to Salt Lake City were filled with public documents, such as Patent Office Reports. They were sent by the representative in Congress from Utah Territory under the franking privilege - printed and transported at public expense.

The mail stations were not very pretentious in appearance nor did they furnish the best of accommodations to the travellers. Mr. Burton describes one of them as follows: "At 12:45 P. M., traveling over the uneven barren, and in a burning sirocco, we reached Lodge-Pole Station, where we made our 'noonin.' The hovel fronting the creek was built like an Irish shanty, or a Beloch hut, against a hillside to save one wall, and it presented a fresh phase of squalor and wretchedness. The mud walls were partly papered with 'Harper's Magazine,' 'Frank Leslie', and the 'New York Illustrated News'; the ceiling was a fine festoon-work of soot, and the floor was much like the ground outside, only not nearly so clean. In a corner stood the usual 'bunks', a mass of mingled rages and buffalo robes; the center of the room was occupied by a rickety table, and boxes, turned up on their long sides acted as chairs. The unescapable stove was there,

filling the interior with the aroma of meat. As usual, the materials for ablution, a 'dipper' or cup, a dingy tin skillet of scanty size, a bit of coarse gritty soap, and a public towel, like a rag of gunny bag, were deposited upon a rickety settle outside."

This was not an exceptionally bad station. Along the Platte beyond Fort Laramie, Mr. Burton and his fellow travellers were forced to sleep in a barn which was "hardly fit for a decently brought-up pig." And among his fellow travellers was a federal judge who had for years been minister at a European court. It was with surprise and even a degree of astonishment that on the Sweetwater one station was encountered, conducted by a Mormon convert and his wife, in which "the table-cloth was clean, so was the cooking, so were the children." White women, Indian squaws or half-breeds were not infrequently found at these mail stations. Besides the poorly cooked meals, whiskey could usually be procured. For the privilege of traveling over this route with all its advantages, the sum of $175 was charged.

So much for the mail and stage-coach facilities from the Missouri to Salt Lake City. Except for the two years beginning in the summer of 1858 and ending June 1, 1860, travel by stage from Salt Lake City to California was impossible and single travellers sometimes accompanied Mormon traders or the mail carrier with his light wagon, or ambulance as they were often called. The mail route west of Salt Lake City followed the emigrant route. So

16. Ibid., p. 95.
17. Ibid., p. 155.
18. Ibid., p. 8.
much cannot be said for the route from that city to California. Some description, therefore, of the new routes opened up now becomes necessary.

Until 1858 the mail from Salt Lake City to California was carried over the regular emigrants roads in summer. But when Major Charpenning secured the contract in 1858, he opened up a shorter route, to the south of Hastings' Cut-Off. From Salt Lake City, this route ran through Camp Floyd, forty-three miles to the south, a little to the west of the northern end of Utah Lake. Thence it ran a little south of west to Fish Springs about a hundred miles from Camp Floyd. The stage then followed a southwesterly course for a day's journey to Pleasant Valley, on what is now the border between Utah and Nevada.

From Pleasant Valley, the road pursued a north-westerly course across Shell Creek, through Ruby Valley, to Pine Creek, thence down that stream to its junction with the Humboldt, at Gravelly Ford some twenty-five or thirty miles below the place where Hastings' Cut-Off joined the main California trail. About fifteen miles from the mouth of the creek the road was forced to pass through a terrible canon. There were on this route only a few stations - some half-dozen in the entire distance of over three hundred miles from Camp Floyd to the Humboldt. After reaching the Humboldt this route followed the usual emigrant trail.

Though this route was over one hundred miles shorter than the emigrant trail from Salt Lake City to California by way of the City of Rocks, it still was not direct enough to suit the mail contractors. In the summer of 1859, Captain J. H. Simpson

20. Ibid., pp. 268-270.
of the Topographical Engineers of the United States Army, who had helped to work out Chorpenning's route in the previous year, made a second reconnaissance and opened up a new route which entirely avoided the Humboldt. Much of this new route was already well known to a Mr. Howard Egan, a Mormon guide, mountaineer and mail-agent.

To whomsoever the credit is due for the discovery of this route, it is certain that the mail contractor soon took advantage of it. In the fall of 1859, Major Chorpenning established a mail route which avoided the Humboldt. It followed the road which had been established in 1858 to Huntingdon Valley, but instead of following down Pine Creek to the Humboldt, it left the old road in Huntingdon Valley and struck off across country to the south, to what is now the southern part of Eureka County, Nevada. From there the route lay almost directly west across Simpson's Park, Reese River and Smith's Creek to the sink of the Carson River and the great emigrant road. This was not exactly the route followed by Captain Simpson but it did not deviate from it to any great extent. Between Salt Lake City and Carson City, on the Carson River, there were twenty-two mail stations in 1860. This new route was about one hundred and forty-five miles shorter than Chorpenning's route of 1858.

23. Ibid, pp. 443-496.
However, both these mail routes and the emigrant trail were closed by snow during the winter, at least until the route was lined with mail stations furnishing fresh mules at regular intervals. As a result, a southern route was opened up. San Bernardino was founded in 1851 by a party of Mormons on the site of an old Spanish mission in Southern California. It was intended partly to act as an outpost for Mormon immigrants entering Utah from the west. Sometime between 1851 and 1855, the southern trail was opened. It was used by the mail-carrier, occasional emigrants and Mormon traders. In summer it was impassable, hence it was used only in winter and early spring.

From Salt Lake City this trail led down to Jordan River to Lehi and along the eastern side of Lake Utah through Provo to Springville. Inclining somewhat to the west of south it passed through Payson and Nephi, crossed the Sevier River and struck across a desolate stretch of country to Fillmore, the capital of Utah Territory. Continuing its way it passed through the towns of Beaver and Parowan to Cedar City. Just beyond the latter town was Panther Creek - in 1858 the last settlement on the road to California.

Beyond Panther Creek the trail crossed the rim of the Great Basin and encountered the head waters of the Santa Clara River. For eighteen miles the road followed this stream, through the territory of the troublesome Santa Clara Indians. Some distance

below the north of the Santa Clara, the road reached the valley of the Rio Virgin, after crossing a mountain range. For forty-miles it followed the Rio Virgin, crossing and recrossing the stream a dozen times or more. The country was dreary and desolate and the road sandy and difficult. Leaving the Rio Virgin and crossing Muddy River a stretch of some fifty-five miles without water was crossed. At the end of it was Las Vegas, a sort of oasis in the desert where the Mormons had established a farm to convert the Indians and to teach them agriculture. But by 1858 this was deserted.

Beyond Las Vegas the desert continued. The trail passed Cottonwood Springs and Mountain Spring, then crossed forty-miles of desert to Kingston Springs and another forty miles of the same sort of country to Bitter Springs. The direction was southwestward and westward. A short distance beyond Bitter Springs the lower waters of the Mojave River where it sinks into the desert were encountered. Following the Mojave west and then southward the trail finally left it and crossed the Sierra Nevadas by Cajon Pass. San Bernardino lay but a short distance beyond.


Closely allied to the mail service was the pony express. During the winter of 1859-60, Mr. William Russell of Russell, Majors and Waddell was in Washington. While there, Senator Gwin of California persuaded him to establish a swifter mail service for California. The prospect of a government contract for the handling of all trans-continental mail was held out. Mr. Russell converted his partners to the idea. The route followed was the mail route already established - the great emigrant trail from St. Jo to Salt Lake City and the new mail route opened in 1859 from Salt Lake City to Carson River, thence by the old road across the Sierras. New stations had to be built, especially west of Salt Lake City. About 190 stations, 200 station-keepers and as many assistants, between 400 and 500 horses, and some eight riders were required.

By April, 1860, all was ready, and on April 3, the service began. The scheduled time was at first ten days from St. Jo to Sacramento - 1950 miles; later this was reduced to eight days. The maximum weight of any mail was twenty pounds, but this was seldom reached. The price was $5.00 for each letter not exceeding one-half ounce; this was later reduced to $2.50. Service was weekly for a time but one June 1, 1860, semi-weekly service was instituted.

31. Ibid., pp. 884-889; Majors, Seventy Years on the Frontier, pp. 184-185.
The pony express was not backed by the government. Russell, Majors and Waddell had the mail contract. They charged the price of $5.00 then $2.50, in advance of the regular postage, for special service. The express was used for the most part by merchants, though the British government also communicated with its Pacific Fleet by means of it. Financially the project was a failure. In a period of sixteen months, the deficit was in the neighborhood of $200,000.33

Early in May, 1860, an Indian war broke out in the region of the Humboldt and Carson River. Fortifications were erected at Virginia City; Silver City and Genoa. On May 12 a small band of volunteers was defeated by the Indians near the Truckee River and about forty-three killed. Volunteers and two companies of regulars soon arrived from California. By the end of May, some 800 troops were in the field. On June 3, the Indians were defeated in a battle along the Truckee and they caused little further trouble. But already every station of the pony express from the Carson River to Simpson's Park had been destroyed. Station-keepers were killed or forced to flee. The stations were burned and the horses killed or driven off. Service was suspended for several weeks. As a result of this war, Fort Churchill was built on the Carson River thirty-five miles below Carson City.

The year 1860 saw the beginning of what was to supersede to a large extent the pony express. In November, a telegraph line

33. Ibid, pp. 890-891.
was completed between Omaha and Fort Kearney. In the same year, the telegraph from California reached Carson City.

An account of the freighting activities of the great overland trail must be prefaced with at least a short story of the Mormon trouble of 1857-1858. In September, 1850, the bill was signed which created Utah as a territory. Her boundaries were California on the west, Oregon on the north, the summit of the Rocky Mountains on the east and the Thirty-seventh parallel on the south. Brigham Young was appointed governor. Three judges of the Supreme Court, the Attorney-General and the United States Marshall were also appointed, two of the five offices being filled by Mormons. The Mormons were not well-disposed toward the Gentile officials and in September, 1851, they left the territory. New ones were appointed who succeeded in living in harmony with the Saints.

In 1854 Young's term as governor expired. President Pierce offered the governorship to Lieutenant Colonel Steptoe who was then in Utah, but Young compromised Steptoe and forced him to decline the offer, and even to sign a petition in favor of the re-appointment of Young. So Young continued to fill the office. But public feeling against the Mormons grew in the East as they learned more about the treatment of federal officials in Utah, the practice of polygamy, and the tendency to disregard federal

35. Morton, op. cit., p. 98.
authority. In July, 1857, President Buchanan appointed Alfred Cumming Governor of Utah, at the same time appointing new federal judges. Troops were to be sent to the Territory to assure the maintenance of national authority.

In the fall of 1857, an advance party was sent to Utah under Colonel E. B. Alexander. This was followed later in the year by the main force under Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston. The total number of troops sent in 1857 was about 2,400.

Governor Brighton Young defied the federal government. He forbade the entrance of armed forces into the territory, raised a Mormon force to oppose any such entrance and placed the Territory under martial law. Breastworks were thrown up in Echo Canon to block the road to Salt Lake City. The federal troops were forced to spend the winter in the vicinity of Fort Bridger.

In the spring of 1858 more troops arrived. But although the Mormons threatened to destroy the crops and everything of value, in the settlements, and take to the mountains if the soldiers entered the Territory, a compromise was arranged and no fighting took place. Governor Cumming and the other federal officials were allowed to take up their duties, the federal troops were allowed to enter the Territory and the Mormons were pardoned for their opposition to federal authority. In the latter part of June, 1858, the army entered Utah and in July, Camp Floyd was established near the northern end of Lake Utah.

41. Ibid., pp. 500-516.
By June 30, there were over 2,350 troops in the field in Utah, 275 at Fort Bridger and about 3,700 en route. Of the latter some were subsequently recalled before they had reached Utah and others were ordered to Washington Territory; one company of artillery and nine of infantry continued to Utah, and two companies of dragoons with ten batteries of artillery were stationed along the Platte. By the summer of 1860, the number of troops had been reduced until but one or two hundred remained at Camp Floyd.

Although the freighting business over the trail had commenced some years previously, it was greatly increased by the Mormon trouble. Though there were smaller companies in the field from time to time, the great freighting company was Russell, Majors and Waddell. Alexander Majors began in the freighting business in 1848. He was occupied for the most part in carrying supplies to the different army posts in New Mexico, Colorado and Utah Territories. Another firm also appeared in the field, Russell and Waddell. In 1855 the two firms combined under the name of Majors and Russell, but after three years, the firm name became Russell, Majors and Waddell. In 1860, Majors bought out his two partners.

Prior to 1858 the firm owned from three to five hundred wagons and teams. In 1858, because of the necessity of supplying the Utah expedition, this was increased to some 3,500 wagons, 40,000 oxen and about 1,000 mules. Over 4,000 men were employed.

43. Burton, op. cit., p. 335.
44. Majors, op. cit., pp. 74-77.
During that year over 8,000 tons of supplies were sent to Utah. The wagons in which the supplies were carried cost from $150 to $175 each. After being unloaded at Camp Floyd they were taken to the suburbs of Salt Lake City, where they covered acres of ground. A year or so afterward they were sold to the Mormons for $10 apiece. The oxen were sometimes driven to California and marketed. In the winter of 1859 the company attempted to winter 3,500 head in Ruby Valley in the present state of Nevada, with the result that a heavy snow covered the grass and only about 200 of the 3,500 survived. In 1857 the Indians ran off a herd of about 1,000 head of cattle belonging to the company near Fort Kearney. In the fall of 1858, on October 4 and 5, before the main body of the federal troops had arrived at Fort Bridger, a small party of Mormons under Major Lot Smith burned two unprotected supply trains, of about twenty-six wagons each, on Green River and a third one on the Big Sandy. Among other provisions, over forty-six tons of bacon, eighty-three tons of flour and four tons of coffee were destroyed. Such were some of the larger aspects of the business.

Prior to 1858 all supplies for the army posts along the trail were loaded at Fort Leavenworth. In 1858 an additional base was established at Nebraska City. About twenty-six wagons usually formed a train. The complement of men consisted of a driver for each train, a wagon-master, assistant wagon-master and a couple of extra hands. The demand for cattle became so great

45. Ibid., pp. 143-145.
47. Majors, op. cit., p. 77
that unbroken ones had to be used to a great extent.

A driver thus described the first attempt at driving a train of unbroken cattle which had finally been yoked up and was beginning to break corral. "It was life work for us to keep our wagons right side up. Twenty six teams of nearly all wild cattle going in every direction - three hundred and twelve head of crazy steers pitching and bellowing and trying to get loose or get away from the wagon, and teamsters working for dear life to head them and keep from upsetting or breaking their wagons; and every now and then a wagon upsetting, tongues breaking, and teams getting loose on the prairie."

By nine o'clock in the evening they had succeeded in getting some of the wagons a distance of two miles from the starting point. The rest were strung over the prairie with broken wheels or broken tongues or else were upset. Repairs had to be sent for and new teamsters hired - for with this initiation, over half of them had deserted. On the second attempt the day's journey was lengthened to four miles, with more mishaps. In six days the train managed to cover forty miles.

Yet in spite of such provocation the teamsters were expected to live an exemplary life. The following code of rules for employees was drawn up by Alexander Majors, first when he was in business alone and later as a member of the firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell. "While I am in the employ of A. Majors, I agree not to use profane language, not to get drunk, not to gamble, not

48. Clark, op. cit., p. 3.
49. Ibid., pp. 3-5.
to treat animals cruelly, and not to do anything else that is incompatible with the conduct of a gentleman, and I agree, if I violate any of the above conditions, to accept my discharge without any pay for my services." Sunday travel was to be avoided unless it was absolutely necessary to obtain grass and water. Bibles were even distributed to the men.

Mr. Majors seemed to have lived under the illusion that all these rules were faithfully obeyed, but Mr. Burton gives a rather different picture. He says: "I scarcely ever say a sober driver; as for profanity, the Western equivalent for hard swearing—they would make the blush of shame crimson the cheek of the old Isis barge." One of the drivers themselves states that his comrades, with few exceptions, "swore like pirates and stole what little there was to steal." They refrained from drinking only when there was nothing to drink.

Out on the prairies, life soon became tiresome and monotonous for both men and beasts. The spirit of the freighting trains is well portrayed by one who himself was a driver. "Our hardships began visibly to affect us. While in the early part of the journey, when our tasks had been comparatively light, the train would have mirthful scenes occasionally. Those were the times when we made short drives; when our diet was composed of something else besides a monotony of bread and pork and pork and bread; and when, on account of the danger of the new men deserting with their 'outfits', the

50. Majors, op. cit., p. 72.
52. Ibid, p. 5.
train officials were less exacting. But now it was different. Slowly and wearily we walked along beside our teams, which were as morose and desponding as their drivers. No sounds are heard as we move over the dreary waste but the dull grating of the wheels as they grind through the yielding sand, and the sharp crack of the whips, as the teamsters urge on the panting oxen. The miserable animals, exhausted by incessant labor and little to eat, move lifelessly along with heads bowed low, casting their tear-filled eyes imploringly for the mercy they seldom got, and sometimes, completely worn out, they drop in their tracks, to swell the number of reeking carcasses and bleached skeletons which line the road. The hearts of all are gladdened at sight of the forming corral, and the oxen quicken their pace when they see it. We unloosen them and they are soon scattering over the sun-burned prairie, seeking to allay their hunger, while we go at our camp duties, getting our wood and water and otherwise preparing for supper. Silently and mechanically we go through our task, a feeling of weariness and sadness, not to say peevishness pervading all. Our campfires, which of old were the scenes of mirthful horseplay, songs and stories, now see nothing but groups of grimy, care-worn men."

There was freighting between Utah and California both by way of the northern routes passing through Carson City and across the mountains and by way of the southern route to San Bernardino. But it did not attain the proportions reached on that part of the trail from the Missouri to Salt Lake City and Camp Floyd. This completes the list of the activities of any great magnitude or importance on the trail aside from emigration.

54. Ibid., pp. 66-67.
Chapter VII

LATER EMIGRATION, 1855-1860; THE CLOSE OF THE PERIOD

With the tracing of the new trails opened to the emigrants between 1849 and 1860 and an account of the emigration during the latter years of the period, and with a statement of conditions along the trail in 1860, as contrasted with conditions in 1849, the history of the great California and Oregon Trail from the time of the gold rush to the Civil War may be concluded.

As early as the year 1850 emigrants began to follow the northern bank of the Platte from Fort Laramie to the upper crossing of the stream, instead of ferrying across at the fort. This was due at first largely to the fact that ferry service was irregular and interrupted. Later it became known that the road on that side of the river was as good or better than the one on the north side.

The federal government, during the late fifties, aided in the improvement of the old trail. During the summer and autumn of 1857 the road along the north side of the Platte from the Missouri westward to the region of Wood River was improved under the direction of the War Department. Bridges were constructed across Omaha Creek, Big and Little Papillon Creeks, across the Elkhorn River and across several other small streams to the west of the Elkhorn.


In the same year work on a more extensive scale was begun under direction of the Department of the Interior. Surveying was done on what was known as the Fort Kearney, South Pass and Honey Lake wagon road. Mr. F. W. Lander was the engineer in charge. The country in the vicinity of Green River and the Wasatch Mountains was thoroughly explored.

In 1858 Lander and his party returned to the vicinity of South Pass. On account of the great emigration and because of the Mormon trouble it was deemed advisable to open a new road westward from South Pass. The three important requirements of such a road were that it should avoid the alkaline plains of the desert between the Big Sandy and Green River; that it should cross the latter stream at a point where fording was possible; and that it should avoid bridge crossings and be supplied with an abundance of grass.

The road as laid out during the summer of 1858 pursued the following course; leaving the old trail at South Pass it ran to the northwest along the base of the Wind River Mountains, thus heading the Little and Big Sandy. After accomplishing this it turned to the west across the basin of Green River, across New Fork, Green River, White Clay Creek and Bitter-root Creek to the Valley of Piney Creek. Following up this stream the road ran through Thompson's Pass and across the head waters of Smith's Fork of Bear River to the valley of Salt River. After passing down the fertile valley of that river for about twenty-one miles it left the stream crossing to Blackfoot Creek, passing John Gray's Lake and following down Ross Creek to the Snake. Just below this point, it joined

the main trail from Bear River.

The opening of this road entailed the moving of over 62,000 cubic yards of earth and rock and the clearing away of some twenty-three miles of heavy pine timber besides about eleven miles of willows. By following the streams, grass and water were assured. The most difficult part of the road was the crossing at Green River. To emigrants this road bore the name of "Lander's Cut-Off."

The improvement of this portion of the trail was followed in the succeeding year, 1859 by the surveying of a portion of the extreme western end of the trail. Having surveyed and examined the route some work was done on it in 1860. The trail which has been traced from the bend of the Humboldt to California by way of Mud Lake, Goose Lake and Pitt River was used by a good portion of the California emigrants, during the year 1849-53. Then a shorter route was opened up. It was this new road which was improved.

Leaving the old road in the vicinity of Mud Lake the newer one turned to the southwest where the older one turned to the northwest. After crossing a desert stretch of about seventy miles it reached Honey Lake, in eastern California. In the seventy miles were five good springs. From Honey Lake it was but a short ways across the Sierra Nevadas to the valley of the Sacramento.

5. Ibid. p. 7.
Practically the only work done on the route from the Humboldt to Honey Lake was the improvement of the various springs along the road. Wells were sunk, reservoirs built, springs enlarged, and lined with stone, and in one case a new spring was discovered and a road opened up to it.

All the important branches of the trail have now been traced. By 1857 there were two roads crossing Green River between Sublette's Cut*Off and the Fort Bridger road - Kinney's road and Baker and Davis's road - but they amounted to little more than separate ferries across Green River for neither was more than twenty-five or thirty miles in length. A double trail along the Platte, which merged into one from the upper crossing to South Pass, practically a single trail from the mouth of Raft River on the Snake to Oregon, but almost a network of branches from South Pass to California - such was the situation in 1860.

Emigration over the trail continued during the latter years of the period along with the other activities. The Mormons disturbances diminished the emigration considerably in the years 1857 and 1858. An Indian war in Washington Territory in the four years 1855-1858 kept out many emigrants who would otherwise have gone there.

9. Ibid., pp. 31-33.


Horace Greeley states that the estimated emigration to California in 1857 was 12,500. Up to August 15 somewhat more than a thousand wagons had crossed Green River at the various ferries. This was less than one-third the emigration of 1854. No estimates are available for 1858 but it was probably considerably larger than that of 1857. By 1859 Lander's road was being used in preference to the others in the vicinity. During that year some 13,000 people passed over it. At South Pass written guides were furnished for the new road. Greeley's estimate for that year was 30,000 California emigrants. No figures are available for 1860.

An interesting phase of the emigration during these years was the march of the Mormon handcart brigades to Utah in 1856. There was almost a failure of crops in Utah in 1855 and money became scarce. Expenses had to be reduced. Hitherto converts from Europe emigrating to Utah had been furnished with teams and wagons for crossing the plains. Now with great crowds waiting to come to Utah some other plan had to be adopted. The one determined upon was to furnish hand-carts to the emigrants upon their arrival in Iowa and let them walk across

the country to Utah, pushing their possessions in hand-carts.

From November 30, 1855 to June 1, 1856 over 4,300 Mormon converts left Liverpool. Nearly 2,400 were prepared to cross the country to Utah in the year 1856. A less number came from other European countries. Some of course traveled at their own expense. Others were aided by their brethren in Utah. Five companies made the trip to Utah with hand-carts during the summer.

The hand-cart emigrants prepared for their journey at Iowa City, Iowa. There they were provided with their carts and provisions. The carts were light affairs with two wheels, the only iron used in their construction being a pair of thin tires. Two wooden shafts projected from the vehicle and were joined by a cross-piece. By means of this it was propelled. Upon arriving at Iowa City the emigrants had to wait for the hand-carts to be manufactured, and for supplies to be furnished.


The first three companies had no great difficulty in completing the trip. But the last two companies which left Iowa City in August, suffered severely. Sand got into the wooden hubs of the carts and ground the axles until they broke. No axle grease had been provided and some of the emigrants were forced to use their none-too-plentiful bacon or soap as a lubricant. The cattle belonging to what few wagons the fourth company had stamped along the Platte east of Fort Kearney and the flour which had been in the wagons was transferred to the hand-carts.

When they reached Fort Laramie, the provisions which were to have been awaiting them there had not arrived and they had to proceed upon reduced rations. By the time they reached the Sweetwater, the season was so far advanced that cold weather was encountered. They were ill-supplied with clothing and bedding. Graves began to mark their course. Dysentery and exposure thinned the ranks. A heavy snow-storm came, covering the ground with a foot of snow. Food arrived soon after but it was followed by a second storm. Fifteen corpses were buried in a single day. Salt Lake City was finally reached on November 9. Of the 400 who left the Missouri River with the party, sixty-seven died on the way.

The fifth and last company, about 600 in number, encountered snow just before leaving the Platte. They abandoned

22. Ibid., pp. 421-425.
their hand-carts shortly afterwards and loaded such few wagons as they had to full capacity. Death claimed a number of the members of this party, also. Others had their toes frozen off and suffered almost worse than death. The hand-cart scheme was not made use of to any great extent after 1856.

Another phase of emigration must be mentioned - the Pike's Peak gold rush. Only a part of the Pike's Peak gold-seekers followed the trail along the Platte, and those who did follow it turned away to the southward, following the south rather than the north fork of the river.

Gold was discovered in the Pike's Peak region in the summer of 1858. Returning miners carried back the news to the East. Great crowds set out for the mines in the spring of the following year. As early as February the rush began. The result was that hundreds reached the gold fields too early to do any mining. Food was scarce. Some became discouraged and set out for their homes in the East. They met the great crowds who were following them to the mines and circulated stories to the effect that the story of the rich gold diggings was a hoax.

The result was a stampeded back to Missouri. By May 1


thousands were returning. Of 150,000 who started for the mines, probably one-third did not reach them. Not all of these followed the Platte of course but many did. As the retreat progressed, merchandise and other property was thrown out upon the prairie, as had been done during the rush to California a decade before. Of some 100,000 who continued to the mines, less than 40,000 remained. Some stayed a few weeks, others did not leave until cold weather. Rich diggings were discovered in the late spring and in the summer. In 1860, the migration to the gold fields equaled or exceeded that of the previous year.

A Review of the political status, in 1860 of the territory through which the California and Oregon Trail ran or into which it led will aid in showing the development that took place in the period from 1849 to 1860. From St. Joseph to the Platte trail ran for a short distance through Kansas Territory. Then it entered Nebraska Territory, a vast expanse extending from Kansas Territory on the south to Canada on the north and from the Missouri River on the east to the Rocky Mountains on the west. Beyond the mountains was Utah Territory reaching from the divide of the Rockies to California. To the north was Washington Territory, embracing the present states of Idaho and Washington and the part of Wyoming west of the Rocky Mountains.

Along the coast were the states of California, admitted in 1850, and Oregon, admitted in 1859.

In Nebraska Territory, exclusive of Indiana, there were 28,778 people, in Washington Territory 11,168, in Oregon, 52,228 and in California 362,196. The federal census of Utah taken in 1860 was taken under very difficult circumstances. It records the population, exclusive of Indiana as slightly over 47,000. In 1859 Mr. Jules Remy estimated the population, exclusive of the Nevada settlements, at 80,000.

That part of the trail which passed through Kansas Territory was lined with settlers. In some localities there was a house every mile. Small trading stations or country grocery stores appeared occasionally. There were numerous towns of considerable size in Nebraska Territory. By 1859 Kearney City, more vulgarly known as Dobytown, situated on the north bank of the Platte near Fort Kearney had a population of about 300 people. It was the outpost of civilization. To the east along Wood River and Loup Fork and between the Loup and the Missouri the country was filling up rapidly. Columbus, founded in 1857, near the junction of the Loup and the Platte, had about 200 people. Fremont was a small village of ten or twelve houses and a small store and tavern. Omaha, in 1860, had a population of 1,861.

26. Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the original Returns of the Eighth Census, pp. 27, 401, 557, 581.
27. Ibid, pp. 563, 575, Nevada is listed separately since it had become a territory before the census report was published.
It will not be necessary to speak of the numerous towns on the various branches of the trail in Utah Territory. The chief settlement on the road from Salt Lake City to the City of Rocks was Ogden City at the mouth of the Weber River. In the western part of the territory in what is now Nevada, rich silver deposits were discovered in the spring of 1859 and the usual rush of miners occurred. By 1860 the chief towns through which the trail passed were Rangtown, population eighty, Carson City, population 714 and Genoa, population 155.

Two of the famous landmarks of the earlier days of the trail - Fort Boise and Fort Hall - were only ruins in 1860. Fort Boise was abandoned in 1856 by the Hudson's Bay Company because of the hostility of the Indians. Fort Hall suffered a similar fate about the same time because the Indians trade was made worthless by a law forbidding the sale of liquor or ammunition to them. By 1859 emigrants to Oregon found a steamboat operating on the Snake between Walla Walla and the Dalles. The journey over the steep Cascade Range could be avoided by taking the steamer.

By 1860 ferries and fords were being replaced by bridges. The bridging of streams between the Missouri and Fort Kearney, on the north side of the Platte has already been noted. Besides these there were bridges built by enterprising traders, who charged a toll. There was one across the Laramie River.

32. Ibid., p. 564.
At the upper crossing of the Platte there were two bridges. The lower one, the first to be constructed, was built and owned by a mountain trader, John Richard. In 1859 Louis Guenot or Ganard built a second bridge a short distance above the earlier one at a cost of about $40,000. Of course bridges were to be found on those branches of the trail running through the Mormon settlements.

With bridges in the place of fords and ferries, with settlements where there had been no vestige of such, with mail and express stations to break the monotony, with stage-coaches and pony express riders and long trains of heavy freight wagons, the great overland trail bore quite a different aspect in 1860 than in '49. Yet essentially it did not differ greatly from the standpoint of the emigrant. There were still the old trials to be encountered. The storms were as fierce and the mud as deep as ever; the clouds of dust were as suffocating. The mosquitoes had lost none of their voracity. Cattle perished from lack of grass and water and their skeletons went to increase those already marking the trail.

35. Senate Executive Documents, 35 Cong., 2 sess., Vol. IX, Doc. 36, Ser. no. 984, p. 56.


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