Crossing the Plains

W. G. BEITH

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by

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JANUARY, 1931

Reprinted from
Enterprise Record Chieftain
Enterprise, Oregon

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FOREWORD

Crossing The Plains tells of Walter G. Beith as a nine-year-old coming with his family on covered wagon to Wallowa County in 1882. It also relates the first years the Beith family spent on Prairie Creek. When *Crossing The Plains* was originally printed in 1931, W. G. Beith only had a few copies printed for his family and friends.

In having my father's book reprinted, we felt that he would be gratified that his grandchildren and great-grandchildren could have copies of it. Other members of the family could learn more of the family history too. It will also be available to those who have a special interest in pioneer stories.

It is our wish to dedicate the new edition to the members of the Beith family.

In the early 1900's my father had saved enough to buy a ranch on the Imnaha River and acquire some sheep. By 1914 when he sold out, he had three ranches and two bands of sheep.

The remainder of his life was spent in Joseph. For a number of years he bought grain and managed the Kerr Gifford Company warehouse. Wheat was one of the principal crops and by Fall, the warehouse was filled with grain waiting to be shipped to Portland.

Father was very interested in farming and stock raising. In summer there was nothing he enjoyed more than driving around Prairie Creek seeing the crops.

To Walt Beith, Wallowa County was an ideal place for these occupations. There was no one who was a more loyal citizen of his home town and county than he was.

Winifred Beith Allen
August, 1979

CHAPTER I

HEADED FOR THE WEST

My father, Robert Beith, was a roving Scotch stone mason and marble cutter. Thoro in his craftsmanship, he always had work when work was wanted. He was, some way, related to a certain Lord Beith and came or was sent to America about 1848. He spent the balance of his life expecting a large inheritance from Scotland which he never received. Unlike most men of his nationality, he was open handed and generous to a fault.

My mother, whose maiden name was Emma French, was born and reared in England, coming to America about the same time. My parents met and were married at Elgin, Illinois, about 1850. Father, always a rover, dragged his family from frontier to frontier. His first move was from Illinois to Minnesota where he remained until after the Civil war, leaving his family while he served four years in the army of the north. Mother endured hardships unthinkable, alone with three small children in a new and alien land while the war dragged on. Finally the Sioux Indians, taking advantage of the absence of the men, went on the war path and mercilessly murdered many families within a few miles of mother's home. It was a time of terror. I have heard mother tell of taking her children aged 6, 4 and 2 years and proceeding on foot by night toward Fort Mankato, thirty miles distant. When the government got into action the uprising was quickly put down. Later 29 of the Indian leaders were hung at Mankato.

Father was detailed by the war department to head a party which was sent to the scene of the uprising. Their duty was to bury the dead and care for the living on the trail of the Indian marauders. So father got the full experience and knowledge of Indian methods of warfare. Among my earliest recollections are the horrible stories of these atrocities which were told in our family. Father would not stay put, when peace and prosperity came to Minnestota father took his family with ox teams and headed for the still newer state of Kansas. This was about 1869, still before my time. They got there in time to participate in the grasshopper frolic.

I recall my sisters telling how the grasshoppers descended in clouds and ate every living thing in a large section of the state—of how the stock had to be killed to save it from starving and what a bitter winter followed. Kansas, after the buffalo were killed and before the development of farming and stock raising was a prairie of heavy grass. It grew tall and rank. Summer's heat and dry winds cooked and cured this heavy grass to a tinder. The terror of the scattered settlements at that time was the dread of prairie fire. A com-

mon practice of settlers to join forces and burn off the grass adjacent to their homes, was the best defense. This was done every summer — but one year the fire beat the settlers to the burning.

A strong wind blew from the north and before anything could be done a wall of flames miles long was seen sweeping down toward us. It came faster than a horse could run. Flames would shoot up caught by the wind the blaze would lap over to the ground and ignite the grass rods ahead only to blaze up and repeat the process. Everything was in confusion. At the Beith homestead horses, cows, hogs, were liberated and the family repaired to a piece of plowed land where we lay and dug our faces into the dirt to escape suffocation. Finally the fire passed as quickly as it came, leaving a blackened ruin. It missed haystacks, corn cribs newly filled, our house, but left nothing else, barns and outhouses, and chickens were burned as well as the hogs, all but one that fell in an old well. Some of the horses and part of the cows escaped by being held in the plowed ground. The housing over the well was gone. This same fire swept for miles until stopped by the Whitewater river. Two men a few miles from us were burned to death and there was large loss of buildings, hay and livestock everywhere.

We stayed in Kansas until the land was pretty well settled up and prosperity again began to head our way. Father would stand for it, but planned to start for Oregon. To a man whose children were born in three different states this longest and most difficult trek of all did not seem out of the ordinary. Accordingly in the autumn of '81 father began laying plans for the trip across the plans. He had no special objective in view, altho he did correspond with F. X. Musty, a former resident of Kansas, but who had emigrated to Oregon the preceding year. Our family at that time consisted of father, mother and six children. Of these two older daughters were married and our brother, Will, who had left home several years before going to the Tex Panhandle. He left home at the age of 17, spending several years in Texas where he rode after cattle frequently, coming up with trail herds to the shipping points of Wichita, Humwell or Dodge City.

In the spring of '82 we received a letter from Will from the lumber woods of Michigan and when he learned that we were preparing for a trip to Oregon he volunteered to drive a team across the plains for us. He was now 23 years of age. Of the other children Jennie was 15, Clara 13 and myself 9. After selling our farm, (which multiplied in value many times in the next ten years) and livestock, father retained the farm team and purchased a team of mules with two strong wagons and extra camp equipment. We prepared to start as soon as grass was good in the spring of '82.

Father had a cupboard built in the rear of one of the wagons to hold dishes and cooking utensils. The front of this cupboard was hinged at the bottom in such a manner that it could be let down. Some legs were hinged to the top so that the legs resting on the ground made a table when in camp. When moving all that was necessary was to fold up the legs, lift up the table and fasten at the top, then it became the front of the cupboard again. Food was stored in one wagon along with clothing, bedding, keepsakes and whatnot. The other wagon held

horse feed, a huge grub box containing the fod for immediate consumption and miscellaneous articles. Each work animal had a pair of hoppies and a nose bag. Theoretically the family were to be equally divided between the two wagons. Actually we rode anywhere or walked as we saw fit. After the first few days of travel the horses and mules were slowed to a plödding gait well within the capacity of anyone afoot. All was in readiness for the start some weeks before the grass was considered sufficiently good.

On the morning of April 27 good byes were said and we started west. My mother was sad and the girls shed bitter tears at parting from all their friends. As a boy of 9, I cannot recall having any regrets. If so, they were swallowed up in my enthusiasm for the great adventure. With no responsibility for the success of the undertaking and with a new world constantly unfolding before me, I was happy. That very night we camped on Walnut creek and I caught my first fish. My brother rigged up a pole and line with a hook baited with a Kansas grasshopper (maybe it was a frog), any way instinct seemed to tell me how to fish. It was dusk and the folks were calling me. Behold, a mighty sunfish 7 or 9 inches long, became impaled on my hook and soon was clasped wigglingly to my breast. Its brilliant coloring gave me a thrill such as I never had before. I have had several small successes in life since then but never one that tasted so sweet at the moment as landing that sunfish. After that one experience I fished every mud puddle stream slough or lake from there to Prairie Creek, Oregon.

On the second day out we fell in with a train consisting of 26 wagons making their way slowly westward. It was made up of a number of families from eastern Kansas, Arkansas and Missouri, who like ourselves were going to Oregon. This party had already employed a guide in the person of an old man by the name of Captain Crawford. Father had not considered it necessary to have a guide, as crossing the plains had become common practice in the preceding 30 years. No Indian depredations had occurred of a worse nature than horse stealing for several years.

However, we joined the company and agreed to pay our pro rata share of Capt. Crawford's salary. He was well worth the money paid him, as was proven later in many ways. A leader is absolutely necessary in the movement of any average group of men. If for no other reason than to tell them where and when to camp. Personally, I never was out with a bunch of hunters or a picnic party but what there was a difference of opinion about where to camp. I was 40 years old, too, before I quit arguing about it.

Capt. Crawford was an active, wiry little man somewhere between 50 and 90 years of age. No one ever seemed to know. He had long, flowing white hair and beard, and used to ride a pony up and down the length of the wagon train giving orders like a field marshal. He wore a gay, red sash and carried a Sharps rifle. He wore dirty overalls and his habit of instructing emigrants in the art of mixing sour dough bread did not help his clothes. With his brilliant red sash and his dough-smeared pants he cut quite a figure for the humorous minded.

He told large stories of the frontier. We boys listened in wide-eyed wonder to it all. It was ten years

before I ever questioned his veracity. However, he had made several previous trips over the road and undoubtedly kept the emigrants out of trouble on many occasions. He was in full control of every move of the train and I believe fully justified his presence.

A guard was with the horses every night who brought them in to camp at 6 o'clock in the morning. Every one was ordered to have his horses hitched and ready to move at 7 o'clock. Any time a camping place with the full requirements, wood, water and grass, was reached by midafternoon or later, camp was struck. Grass was abundant everywhere during May and June, so that only wood and water had to be considered. Some times Capt. Crawford would ride miles ahead of the train to spot a camp for the night, but for the most part he knew from previous trips where we would stop.

The first weeks of the trip were very pleasant to all concerned; the weather was beautiful, young folks were getting acquainted, forming friendships, singing and playing by the campfire. Every day brought its new expreiences. We were for the most part blissfully unconscious of the hardships which were to come later.

CHAPTER II

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

May was an ideal month in which to travel. Seasonable rains, warm in that section, and much sunshine was the rule. Thru the length of Kansas and into Colorado we went with little hardship. Grass was abundant and water fairly plentiful. Prairie roads were very good. By meeting east bound travelers we found that only a few emigrant trains were ahead of us, tho from other sources which might be called the "grape vine telegraph" we learned there were many behind. We were passing and repassing each other all the way to the coast. A hail and a farewell, as all thru life.

"We meet and part like leaves afloat on the river's restless tide."

We met odd characters. A family from the mountains of Kentucky joined us at Hutchinson, Kansas. A father, mother and three pretty girls, aged from 15 to 19 years. There was nothing so very remarkable about this family except that every member chewed plug tobacco and swore. These girls could chew and spit equal to any bull whacker on the road. Anyone of them could give an exhibition of undiluted profanity such as would turn a mule skinner green with envy. Also those young ladies could take a long barreled muzzle loading rifle, of which they had four in the family, and shoot the head off a prairie dog at 100 yards. Outside of the above accomplishments they were normal and companionable girls.

The first Indians I ever saw were met at some agency in western Kansas. I had listened to the older members of the family read Leather Stocking Tales and so was prepared to meet superior beings, men of simplicity, virtue, and dignity—yes, even cleanliness. But these were not the J. Fenimore Cooper grade of "siwash." They were only the loafing agency type who hung along the emigrant road and begged. Also we ran onto the cowboy of song and story some-

where here. One real live specimen attached himself to our train. Yes, he was lean and brown and hard bitten just as the story books prophesied he would be. Drifting into our camp one noon with a saddle horse and a bed roll, he stated himself to be headed some four or five days west and wanted to eat with some family, offering to pay in advance for board. An emigrant agreed to the proposition without consulting the captain or his fellow travelers. Mr. Cowboy, who, upon inquiry, gave his name as Wilson, did not immediately tell every member of the party all about himself. And so conjecture began. Who was he? and what was his motive in joining us?

It was whispered from wagon to wagon that he belonged to a well organized band of horse thieves somewhere ahead. They would descend on us at a given signal and joined by Mr. Wilson would run off every horse in the camp and maybe kill us. Some of the elders thought that he might kidnap one of the girls of the train. They seemed to like him. My brother, Will, who knew cowboys, talked with him and was satisfied of his honesty. Instead, however, of saying so, he did just the reverse. In order to hear the elders talk, my brother pretended to be suspicious. Being reserved and a bit bashful Mr. Wilson said little at first but soon was playing with the kids and helping the women cook. He wanted to do his full share and offered to take turn on night herd. This aroused suspicion more than ever.

The girls liked him, the kids adored him, and when he soundly thrashed a Missourian for brutally beating a horse, the whole train rather admired him. He stayed with us one day longer than he had specified, probably because we traveled more slowly than expected. Just when the company was about to be split in two parts because some wanted to run Mr. Wilson out of camp and others did not; he solved the matter after breakfast by saying: "I am leaving you here, my brother-in-law has a horse ranch 60 miles north. So long, everybody." A wave of the hand and he rode away.

It was six weeks later and a thousand miles west when we began meeting families returning from the west. Always traveling alone, they were a sorry looking lot, those few who gave up. Their outfit would be ready to fall to pieces. They were invariably voluably damning the west, by sections and as a whole.

They were going back to "God's country" (God's country being "that land of every land the pride", their birthplace). Capt. Crawford and others told us that of the emigration of any one year, always a certain percent returned over the road the next season going home to "God's country" wherever it was.

I think we were in western Kansas when we were reduced to the necessity of using "buffalo chips" for fuel. Many of the women fought shy of this method of making the kettle boil. They would do anything first but it was not long until one could see apron's full of "chips" coming into camp from every direction. A little farther west buffalo bones were found. The prairie was dotted and speckled with the bleached white bones of millions of buffalo.

A railroad line was being pushed through the summer of '82. It was to connect at Salt Lake City with a line from San Francisco. When the road was through there developed an immense business in gathering buffalo bones. Thousands of car loads were salvaged

and used for fertilizer or otherwise. Soon after we crossed the Colorado line we began to see signs of irrigation, the first any of us had ever seen.

Then the mountains burst into view on the western horizon. Personally, I had never seen a hill over 10 feet high, so the first sight of the Rockies was a revelation; in the rarified air of Colorado, Pike's Peak seemed to be not more than a day's travel away. Instead, we toiled onward two weeks before reaching a point parallel with that glittering pinacle.

We reached Fort Collins. Here the leaders of the train planned to stop to rest the work stock and do some much needed washing of clothes, repairing of equipment, etc.. A large irrigation canal had been drained for the purpose of making it larger; teams were at work up and down the ditch; it was a rush job. As signs were up offering work to men and teams, a few of the emigrants went to work. It was a beautiful place; level and green with mountains in the background. In exploring trips here and there we youngsters of the train found wonders and joys untold. Evidently the canal had not been shut off for some time as pot holes and pockets were filled with water containing catfish and suckers. How we scrambled up and down the bed of this ditch and what excitement as we captured fish enough for the whole train.

I had not intended making this a personal biography, but I must tell of a day at Fort Collins, the story of which involves myself and four other lads ranging in age from 8 to 10 years.

Just after breakfast we wandered off in search of adventure. Our way led far from camp where a small stream and a series of willow-bordered swamps stretched on and on. Blackbirds by thousands were flying up and down this water course, and we saw so many nests in the willows that some one suggested that we should gather a lot of eggs and cook them over a camp fire.

Our party voted unanimously, of course, to do that very thing. We sent the youngest boy to camp with instructions to get a bucket and some matches. We advised him not to say too much as to the occasion of their use, grown folks being so peculiar. He did his job well, returning with a bright new pail and a block of matches; he said everybody was so busy they hardly knew he was in camp.

Away we went. Low bushes made it easy to reach the nests and they were there in plenty and for several hours we plied our nefarious trade. Finally, having the two-gallon pail nearly half full, we concluded we had enough for a fair lunch; little did we know that the eggs were in every stage of the process of incubation. After finally achieving a fire we started to boil our eggs, waiting patiently for dinner but as soon as the water became hot our nostrils were assailed by a somewhat funny odor; the longer it boiled the stronger was the smell; finally after the stench became so bad that we were holding our several noses and backing away from the fire, it dawned on some one that we could never eat those eggs. This was a crushing disappointment, but rallying from the blow, we wandered farther afield, alternately throwing rocks at prairie dogs and wading in the swamps. In spite of the eggs going bad we had a wonderful day. We were rather innocent in the matter—there were so many birds they could lay more eggs; anyway, it wasn't any worse to take the

eggs from blackbirds than to take them away from hens.

The sun was low in the west when we , tired and almost famished, began to take account of stock. We were five miles from camp, had waded through alkali dust and through the water so much all day that our bare feet were chapped and bleeding. The shiney bucket was burned up, we did not even know where it was, our people would be worried about us. As we limped home in the shadows of evening, some of the boys were crying. The parents had been worried but reacted differently; one father whipped his boy brutally with a buggy whip before the whole camp. My parents were wholly sympathetic that night. They fed me, doctored my suffering feet and put me to bed. Not a word as to the events of the day.

Next morning father asked me very pleasantly how we amused ourselves yesterday, and I was soon telling him all about it. He gave me a talk on a boy's responsibility as a family unit, saying I owed it to my mother not to cause her anxiety by not keeping her informed as to my whereabouts. He said, too, that it being a natural law if you touched fire you were burned, my chapped feet were a direct result of alkali dust and water; that I, myself, was the one to accept responsibility for avoiding sore feet. The incident of the ruined water pail he dismissed as unimportant, a mere error of judgment that age would correct.

He talked long and earnestly however, on the subject of robbing birds' nests. He was surprised that a boy of my character and intelligence should do it; he blamed himself that he had not talked with me on that particular subject. He went on and explained the uses of birds in the general scheme of nature, and also drew a heart rending picture of the agony of the parent birds over their ruined home. He talked until I felt directly responsible for the next crop failure and shed tears of sympathy for the mother birds. Father's way was probably the best.

It is a fact that the boy who was whipped so cruelly, also his brothers, turned out bad. They settled in Idaho where we kept track of them for twenty years. Nearly all of them served time in the Idaho penitentiary — and just see how I turned out!

CHAPTER III

IN THE HEART OF THE WEST

After three days at Fort Collins, Colo., we resumed our journey westward. Still fine weather, still good grass and water and fuel not too hard to come by. This was the most enjoyable part of the trip. Small game was plentiful, prairie chicken, quail, rabbits, ducks, curlew and, farther west, sage hens. We had many shotguns in the train and our easterners were right at home in hunting such game. Father, having supported his family at least two winters in Kansas, by hunting prairie chickens and ducks for the market, was expert with the shotgun.

Somewhere in Colorado we began to meet hunters and trappers returning from a winter in the Rockies. Some with pack horses and some with wagons. Several four-horse wagons loaded heavily with hides and pelts, together with jerk-

ed venison and trophies of the hunt, such as antelope, deer and elk horns, led us to expect big game farther on. We had a number of heavy rifles in the train. They were black powder guns, Sharps, army muskets and the like. Before starting, father had bought a rifle that weighed almost as much as I did at that time. We were quite content with small game thru Kansas and part of Colorado, but later we expected to feast on deer, bear, elk and antelope, maybe a buffalo or two.

To anticipate the story I will say here that we got no buffalo and very few specimens of any large game while crossing the plains. It was there in plenty, altho mostly back from the emigrant road somewhat. We saw all kinds, even four head of buffalo ,that as yet had not been killed. For two hundred miles while crossing the Laramie plains in Wyoming we were not out of sight of herds of antelope for a moment. Level as far as the eye could see, in any direction one could observe band after band. Indeed, it is a fact that we could, and often did, count fifty bands of from a half dozen to twenty or thirty individuals, within the radius of our vision. Those easterners were not skilled in the pursuit of big game. Maybe they were subject to "buck fever." Whatever the cause, very few antelope or deer fell to their rifles and no bear or elk. I have often thought in later years that if we had had just one of the boys raised on Imnaha, say Kenneth Blevans with his "32 special", or Lee Butler with the "56 Newton" he used to shoot, one of the Keener or Nieman boys, or one of the Marks or Wilsons, I say any one of these lads with a modern high powered rifle would have kept that whole train in meat from Colorado to near Boise City.

Before we reached the western border of Colorado a deluge of late June rains struck us. The roads became heavy and difficult; washed-out gullies across the roadway were hard to cross. Finally as a climax we reached a swollen stream that almost stopped us. There had been a bridge. There was visible evidence of this and also of its having been swept away by the flood most recently. We stopped. Most of the men and some of the women held a council. It did not look possible to cross that little spring branch with our outfit. The banks were straight up and down and the creek looked like it would swim a horse. It did not look like a suitable place to locate, we did not want to go back to Kansas, neither did we want to wait until Colorado built a new bridge.

A young man stripped the harness from a mule and rode it across. The water came up close to its back but did not swim. After an hour's parley plans were made to cross. Some got out shovels, picks, axes, anything to dig with, and proceeded to reduce the bank to a gentle slope of not much over 45 degrees. Some rode mules across and worked on the other bank. The wagon beds were chained down to the running gears to keep them from floating away. The wiser ones could see that while a team could be driven into the creek and part way across, how could they get up the opposite bank? Finally they took six mules across, also all the log chains available. These were hitched together to provide power to snatch the wagons up the bank. My brother, Will, who had proved hmiself a very capable teamster, drove in first; a young man was on the other bank with a chain ready to hook onto the wagon tongue whenever

he could reach it. It was not hard to get into the creek, indeed the wagon simply pushed the team in, then there was a lot of whipping and splashing, the horses could not get much purchase to pull in that deep water. However, that same water buoyed up the wagons and made them light. He got to the opposite bank, the helper hooked the chain, the six mules hit their collars, the whole layout was jerked up on the opposite bank before you could tell it. This same process was repeated with each of the 30 wagons in the train.

My brother having driven over first was elected to drive the others. It took all day to cross. Dark found us happily encamped on the other side with nothing worse than a lot of wet bedding and other goods.

We must have passed out of Colorado to the north, because the next state I remember is Wyoming. As June passed, hot weather was the rule. We struck the sage brush country. Traveling became more difficult and tiresome. Sage brush and sand, sage brush and sand, mountains always in the blue distance, toiling along day after day in our inch-slow way became monotonous. Settlements had been left behind, there was no variation in the landscape for weeks. Grass became parched and dry. Jack rabbits bobbing off thru the sage brush, lizards slithering across the road, a coyote like a gray shadow slipping away, horses toiling along and becoming thinner in flesh every day. Capt. Crawford counseled us always to save and care for our work stock. Indeed they were our only dependence. The sand, always the sand, sucking at slow wheels. Then was the day of the great freighting outfits. On these long desert roads three or four wagons behind 20 mules driven by a jerk line was the rule. Often we met several of these moving caravans in a day, driven by grizzled "desert rats". Patient and imperturbable, they spat tobacco juice and usually said nothing. Here we guarded our horses with extra care. Other wagon teams ahead and behind had horses stolen. The papers were full of reports that that and the preceding year regularly organized bands of "rustlers" operated on a large scale along the emigrant road. They would drive off the horses from a small train sometimes taking the last horse. A hundred miles north, or a hundred miles south ,and they were safe. The emigrant victim was helpless, not knowing the country, having neither time to spend or money to pursue an investigation he usually did as the "rustlers" expected—he bought more horses, often from confederates of these same horse thieves, and sometimes horses that had been stolen from previous emigrant trains.

Capt. Crawford watched over the horses like a mother. A young man from Missouri with my brother, Will, did most of the night herding. They learned to sleep rolled up in a blanket anywhere on the prairie. A young saddle horse was used and kept saddled, a rope to his foot, the other end of which was taken in the hand. The herder would roll up in his blanket and roll up in the rope as well. If the horse herd grazed far away, the young horse made a fuss, whinnying and pulling on the rope. This would awaken the guard who would get on his poney and move up to the herd. These boys learned to sleep on a hair trigger. Any disturbance among the horses and they got up shooting. On one occasion they brought a young man into camp and tied him hand and foot in a tent; there he was left un-

til morning when he was given his breakfast and turned loose. Some of the women of the train were inclined to consider his treatment as high-handed and uncalled for. They were rather apologetic to the man next morning, when he said: "Lady you don't owe me any apology. I and my bunch have rustled 500 horses in the last two seasons, and you would have been a-foot right now if the guards had not taken me in."

Now we come to the historic Independence Rock. a great square stone. You wonder where it came from. Thousands of names cut in its soft surface and some place near here Capt. Crawford led a party some distance from camp one night to the site where an entire emigrant train had been killed by Indians some years previous. The wagons had been burned; strewn in the ashes were the iron tires, hub bands, etc., grim reminders of the slaughter. The government had buried as many as could be recovered of the dead. These graves with briefly inscribed headstones were nearby.

It is but a step from tragedy to comedy. Immediately afterward, we found the "talking rock." I don't know where but think at the crossing of Green river. Strolling a short distance from camp some young folks found a flat square stone with words cut in its surface. These were the words: "Turn me over." The finders were curious. They thought of buried treasure, a last message, many things. So, altho it was a heavy stone, they heaved it over. On the under side were cut the words: "Now turn me back and let some other fool turn me over." A good many found the Talking Rock that season.

CHAPTER IV

THROUGH A CORNER OF UTAH

Proceeding slowly westward across Wyoming into Utah, the way became more and more difficult. Sage brush and sand seemed endless. It became harder and harder to find horsefeed. Increasingly, it seemed as if the wagons were too heavily loaded. It was here that emigrants began to cast away heavy articles such as dutch ovens, pieces of furniture, etc. The wide plains were strewn with all manner of articles which had been ditched by the wayside.

As June gave way to July, hot weather added to the discomforts of the train. Settlements were farther apart and water of good quality scarce. One day the captain announced that just ahead of us was a stretch of 40 miles without water. By his advice we stopped and rested a day at the last watering place. Then, filling every canteen, churn, keg or barrel, we pulled out at 4 o'clock p. m., hoping to cross this waterless stretch by an all night drive.

The way was all heavy and after driving thru the night while most of us slept, morning found us in the same gray plain of sagebrush and sand. Forty miles is not far for these days. That many minutes in a high-powered car or 20 minutes in a plane.

We made a dry camp at 6 o'clock that morning, after 14 hours of steady traveling. A volunteer statistician of the train estimated that we were making two miles an hour. Providing Capt. Crawford was right

in his calculations this meant 28 miles covered and 12 miles yet to go. After resting the horses an hour or two and giving them what water was left, all but a few canteens full for our own use, we started on.

This day was a nightmare to the older ones of the train. The sun beat down mercilessly while the sand dragged at the wheels. The weary teams plodded on becoming slower as the day advanced. Noon found us in the same dreary desert. Another dry camp with no water for the horses and very little for us. Some were uneasy and some were frankly frightened. The question was, did Capt. Crawford know what he was talking about? Was there water at the end of 40 miles? As far as one could tell it might be 100 miles. There was no hilarity and not much conversation at this noon meal.

Hitching up again the train pushed slowly on. About 3 o'clock a peculiar accident happened. The wagon of one of the emigrants suddenly collapsed into the sand. A ront axle was broken, probably had been cracked 100 miles back in some rocky canyon and just then let go. For the moment, and in the state of mind of that emigrant train, this seemed a terrible tragedy. We were done for indeed, and all was consternation. Men, women and children poured out of the wagons. Men were much concerned and women were wringing their hands and crying.

Capt. Crawford remained cool in this emergency. He ordered two young men to each take a mule and go to a quaking asp grove that appeared a few miles away. They were to take an ax and bring back the best stick they could get as quickly as possible. Willing hands unloaded the wagon, removing the broken parts; tools were unloaded, the boys on the mules returned in an incredible short space of time with a rather straight piece of timber. This was cut down and fitted rapidly till it would hold for the time being; the wagon was assembled and loaded in a jiffy. By 4:30 we were plodding along as if nothing had happened. An hour later we were encamped by a sluggish stream, all happy and joking about the experience of the day.

Most of the way my individual happiness was marred by bruised and chapped feet. I had shoes but for some reason unaccountable to me now, I refused to wear them. One day huddled in a wagon with bandaged feet, the next going again thru the alkali and water, I was like the account Alex Warnock gave once of a pair of bloodhound pups he owned.

Mr. Warnock said that soon after he settled on Snake river he sent away and got two six month-old hound pups with the idea of trailing wild cats, coons, etc. With aid of the dogs, he thought it would be a simple matter to tree these varmints where he could shoot them and thus save his chickens. It did not work out that way because those pups would strike out on a coyote trail and run for days. He would hear them bellowing in the rims but could not capture or pull them from the trail. Finally, they would come limping in so weary and sore-footed that they would lie down every hundred yards to rest and lick their feet. About the time they were rested a little and their feet somewhat recovered—just when he planned to take them out after cat or coon, away they would go on another coyote trail and repeat the process of exhaustion.

I was just like those pups and

my feet never got permanently well until we reached Prairie Creek, Oregon. The dogs of our train, of which there were about twenty, became thoroly cured of chasing jackbarrits. In Colorado and western Kansas they had a glorious time for awhile; then we struck a country covered with cactus. The dogs would be at the heels of a racing jack or cottontail when they would jump into a bed of this prickly vegetation and lose all interest in the rabbit. By the time we reached Wyoming not a dog in the train would pay the slightest attention to rabbits that were bobbing every where in the sage.

Somewhere on the route we struck a range of partially timbered hills. I don't know where it was, but this territory for 100 miles was inhabited by large numbers of porcupines, the first of these animals most of us had ever seen. Our eastern dogs, too, were totally unacquainted with this most independent and capable of animal characters. Morning, noon and night, the camp site rang with the ki-yi-ing of some dog. It was only his owner picking the quills out of his dog's face with a pair of tweezers.

Only one dog in the outfit ever killed a porcupine. This was a little bench-legged bull dog who persisted altho he had to have a facial treatment four times a day. Finally he learned to slide under the porky, throw it over on its back and get a death grip on its breast where there were no quills. Mr. bulldog killed several, but invariably got his face full of stickers, mostly about the eyes.

Crossing into Utah, finally the sage brush gave way to grassy prairies and fertile valleys. Thickly settled for the most part. The small towns contained fine houses, with ordered shrubbery, green lawns and creeping vines, such a contrast to the sod shanties and parched surroundings of Wyoming.

We camped two days in the edge of Ogdon, not far from the railroad yards. It was here that an accident befell yours truly. Pardon me for bringing myself so much into the picture. I can remember things that happened to me, while I fail to recall other and more important events. Another boy and I were wandering idly thru the railroad yards when we observed a freight train just moving slowly out going east. It was loaded with rock salt. I don't know whether it was an especially made salt car or a stock car, at any rate there were cracks in the side. Naturally, I needed a chunk of salt the worst way and so I ran along the side of a car, reaching in my arm.

I don't know yet just how it happened but the train was gaining momentum and my hand slipped back where the crack was narrower and so became fast. I pulled back and tried to stop the train, to no avail, it was gaining speed all the time. My wild yells were drowned in the noise of the train, and I thought I was sure going east, until a quick-witted Chinese section hand ran in with a pick. He socked it into the crack, pried off a slat, spilling me and a quantity of salt all along the right of way. What I needed then was obvious to even a Chinaman. I got it, together with a lot of pigeon English which I understood to mean I was to beat it for camp and stay out of the railroad yards. I never told my folks of this escapade until years afterwards.

We crossed the corner of Utah and passed into Idaho early in July, finding more desert, a larger variety of sage brush and an equal

amount of sand. The jackrabbits, if anything, were more plentiful from Soda Springs to Pocatello than any place on the route. They were continually hopping away, dozens in sight at all times. The dogs were not interested.

The lava beds then mingled with and partially took the place of the sage. It looked in places as if some time the rock had been liquid and had run and spread like water over a field only to congeal in pools and riffles.

Some place here we overtook a family who were stopping to rest their team. The man of the family proved to be a stone mason by name of Pickens from Kansas, only a county or two away from our home in that state. Father had worked with this Pickens on jobs in Kansas and in spite of the objections of the rest of the family, insisted on stopping behind the train to see his old friend thru to Oregon. We expected to catch up with the train shortly, but never did. They carried on a one-sided correspondence with us by leaving notes in camps they had occupied. We got the notes, but could not send any ahead.

Another considerable train, some 18 families from Kansas and Missouri, overtook us. Here we made the grand mistake of the trip. We had heard of the "Sublette cutoff", afterward designated as the "Boise cutoff." We thought that possibly by taking that shorter route we might overtake our wagon train. This was a terrible road or trail, as it turned out to be, steep hills often requiring six horses to pull up a pitch, sidling road that half a dozen men had to hold each wagon on the grade by main strength. To cap it all, we came to a jumpoff where wagons had to be let down a 200-foot hill that was almost half pitch. Some one, the county, or state, had provided a huge rope here. It was coiled around a stump at the top of the hill, obviously for the purpose of letting down wagons. The rope would be attached to the rear axle, several men would let it play over the stump, the driver would walk by his team, slowly and gradually he would be let down in safety.

It was a Missourian who jumped on the high seat of his wagon to ride it down, saying, "God hates a coward." A few minutes after when only half way down the rope slipped off the stumps, the outfit skated down, jack-knifed and turned over at the foot of the hill, dislocating the driver's shoulder. It was a Kansas jawhawker who them expressed a doubt as to whether "God hated a coward any more than he did a fool."

Reaching the main traveled road again, we were informed by a note found in a camp that we had lost ground by taking this "cut-off."

CHAPTER V

ENTER WALLOWA COUNTY

Picture a long, drawnout wagon train crawling along Snake river. The bright new wagon covers of Kansas and Missouri have changed to torn, smoke-begrimed canvas flapping the breeze and which now barely covered the much-mended wagon bows. Gaunt harness-galled horses with low heads are straining on mile after slow mile; cooking utensils, dented and blackened are hanging everywhere on each

lumbering vehicle; dogs with lolling tongues trailing indifferently behind, fifty percent of the members of the train trudging along on foot to lighten the labor of horses; overalls, sunbonnets, slouch hats badly worn boots, patiently toiling on. I am sure we neither looked or felt like the Empire Builders we were called by a flattering press of a later day.

The next I remember were the mosquitos opposite the mouth of the Payette river. The late afternoon of a sultry day found us at a spot the physical aspects of which denoted an ideal camp site. Signs and placards were here and there on that wide meadow, humorous, profane, or matter of fact, but all having to do with the prevalence of mosquitos in this camp. Teams were unhitched, fires built and supper started when the swarming insects began their evening activities. They were so numerous and fierce that we literally could not stand against them.

With one accord the whole outfit suddenly began rehitching the horses and piling everything helter skelter into the wagons. Soon we were pulling away from the river; a mile or so farther we made a dry camp on a bench where an evening breeze rid us of the pests.

The well organized wagon train led by Capt. Crawford, with which we had traveled so long, was far ahead. The one we were with now was composed of stragglers and unattached families. It had no leader, there was constant bickering and almost daily some one pulled out by himself declaring he would not travel with such blankety blank idiots as composed that train. Other stragglers. however, attached themselves to us so there were usually 20 or 25 wagons. Some turned off for points in Idaho where they proposed to settle. Others pushed on headed for Oregon and Washington Territory. Overtaking stragglers as we proceeded there was a constant change in the personnel of the train.

After having crawled along the banks of the Snake river for weeks we left it and entered Oregon by crossing over on a flat boat known as the "Washoe Ferry", crossing the Weiser river also by a ferry, I think where the town of Ontario was later built. In those days it seemed every bridge was a "toll" bridge and each road across the mountains was a "toll" road. Indeed, it cost the wagon trains considerable in the aggregate in "tolls" for bridges, ferries and "toll gates". These are now almost a thing of the past in the west.

Baker City was quite a thriving town in a mining district. La Grande was smaller, though Grande Ronde valley was well settled at that time. Union county then comprised all of what is now Wallowa county. Union was the county seat.

With a few families we passed La Grande, crossing the Blue Mountains over a toll road known as the "Meacham road"; passing a wild little town, Pendleton. Here we camped over Sunday on the Umatilla river and caught some fine trout close to Pendleton. Then we pulled on to Walla Walla and camped a few days on Mill creek. While enroute, at Echo, or maybe it was Touchet station, some ranchers tried to induce us to settle there. They were minus a teacher and offered their school to my sister, Jennie, who had now turned 16. The country was dry and desolate, we wanted none of it.

From Walla Walla, which was the largest town we had struck since leaving Salt Lake City, father and Will crossed the Columbia into Clickitat and Kittitas counties, in Washington, looking for land. They

found the same dead and barren country, about the same as so much we had traveled through, and so came back discouraged. Harvest was in full blast in the fertile Walla Walla valley. Jobs for men and teams being plentiful, Will went to work with a threshing crew. The rest of us with one team then headed back for Wallowa valley of which we had heard before leaving Kansas through correspondence with F. X. Musty of Prairie creek. Although the whole Palouse country was more or less open for settlement, we did not find it.

This was a wide expanse of valleys and rolling bunch grass hills mostly devoted to stock raising. Some were beginning to experiment with wheat, but in '82 there were still homesteads to be taken. Then, too, any of the land could have been bought for a few dollars an acre. Many fortunes were afterwards made in wheat raising in the Palouse country as it proved later to be one of the best natural wheat belts of the world.

The evening of August 7 we camped on the Wallowa river below where the town of Wallowa was later built. There was more green meadows and running water here than any place this side of Utah. At that time there were a few settlers along the water courses all up the valley. There were postoffices and stores at Diamond Prairie, Lostine, Alder, Joseph and Prairie creek. The site of Enterprise was an alakali flat, one homestead graced the landscape, hundreds of range cattle and horses were along the creek having come in from the hills to water, where Enterprise now stands.

We camped for dinner on Trout creek where we met a man from Grande Ronde who had been up to Wallowa lake putting up red fish. He had a wagon load of these fish salted in what was called fish "kits" rather small barrels or kegs. He gave us a fresh red fish which we had for dinner. This man told us that the first settlement had been made in Wallowa valley eight years previous. The records show, however, that the Bramletts, Masterson and Tully families settled in the lower valley in the fall of '72 which would make it 10 years before we came. There was a settlement on Alder Slope several years old and one on Prairie Creek. These settlers had been located from one to six years. Probably in '82 there was all told a population of between four and five hundred persons in Wallowa county.

On the evening of August 8 we pulled into the yard at the home of F. X. Musty on Prairie creek. This homestead is now owned and occupied by Chas. McClain. The Musty family welcomed us open handedly, finding us a cabin to move into until we could get located and giving us all the information and any aid in their power. Mr. Musty told us the first settler on Prairie Creek had been located six years. Of three Perkins families, none remain today. This holds good for the Davis, Downey, Hawk, Musty, Rich, Hill, Hutchinson, Weatherly, Winters, Gaily, Valentine, Wilson and Asa McCully families. No relatives or descendants remain in the neighborhood. Of the Roup, Meek, Warden, Tucker, Estes, McClain, Geo. Wilson, Hepburn and Proebstel families some or many descendants live close by. Most of the former list have one or more descendants living in the county, however.

There were almost 100 children enrolled in the Prairie creek school as the largest single settlement in the valley was here. The school house was on land now owned by J. H. Buchanan. A Miss Pickett,

daughter of a pioneer minister in the lower valley, was teacher when we came. I believe she still lives in Wallowa. Close by the school was the remains of a great log fort. Here we were told the settlers had barricaded themselves against the Indians during the Indian outbreak of a few summers before. The next morning after our arrival, Mr. Musty, father and myself rode horseback across the lake hill to the head of Wallowa lake.

Here we found a Mr. Thompson, known then as "One-armed Thompson" he being an uncle of our present Mark Thompson. He was a trapper by profession, but during the red fish season, he teamed up with John McCall, who had only one leg. They seined red fish and salted them down by the thousand, trading or selling them as they could to all comers. Some hundred or so of Indians were camped along the lake or at its head. Not less than 500 Indian ponies of all colors fed on the lake hills while the squaws caught and dried red fish. The bucks hunted, gambled and raced horses with the whites. Of red fish, there was no limit. They were so plentiful in the small streams at the head of the lake that the bucks did not bother with them. The squaws, by the help of children and dogs, caught all that was wanted. The Indians had several dogs trained to hunt fish like they would rabbits. They would catch and hold a flopping fish until some one came.

I could not see why anybody stayed on in Kansas. It seemed to me Wallowa valley then was the one place in all the world. Father caught a lot of trout that day—he only stopped catching them when he figured he had all we could carry home. He had his shot gun along and added eight or ten grouse to the load on the way back.

On the following Monday I started to school. Only nine years old, I was a little timid among so many strangers. Before school convened that first day two young ladies aged about 16, accosted me. In a teasing humor they finally caught and kissed me. This was a terrible shock to my dignity and I never forgot my embarrassment. The girls' names, I afterward learned, were Minnie Flagg and Frankie Simmons. Minnie Flagg later married John Hays and lives in the edge of Joseph today. She never kissed me again and perhaps has forgotten that occasion.

Frankie Simmons, who died in young womanhood, was an elder sister of John Simmons, who lived until recently near Joseph.

We have "crossed the plains" and logically these sketches should end. but I wish to reserve a chapter or two in which to write of the conditions we found, also the customs of that early day.

CHAPTER VI

EARLY LIFE IN THE VALLEY

Since writing the last chapter, the names of other residents of Prairie Creek and vicinity has occurred to me. Dan Kinney and family lived on a homestead which is now a part of the D. G. Tucker holdings. J. A. Rumble and family and Milt Vermilion, a bachelor, lived on Little Sheep.

George Rivers, also a bachelor, lived on the east side of Upper Prairie creek. John and George

McKay, both single men, had homesteads, John owned the Ben Knapper place, now occupied by Ben Marks, while George had a ranch farther east. John Farnsworth and William Locke both family men, had homes on lower Prairie creek.

John Hawk, who had been killed by vigilantes the summer before we came, left a homestead which is a part of the land now owned by Mrs. D. B. Hendricks.

Mr. Creighton, whose name I think was also John, owned the ranch which is now occupied by Ray Poague and which still belongs to the Creighton heirs. This place was the best improved of any, having the first painted frame house and, I think, the only painted farm house in the valley.

J. C. Hutchinson, tho not living on his farm at the time, owned deeded land on Prairie creek, the 160 acres now held by L. E. Thornburg. This was the first deeded land in the county.

T. F. Rich had a homestead and a small store on Prairie creek on the farm now owned by Robert Williams. The store was discontinued a year or so after we came. Matt Johnson had a small store in Joseph, as did also F. D. McCully. The story was told that some two or three years before Mr. McCully, wanting to dress up on the occasion of a Fourth of July celebration, went to Matt Johnson to buy a pair of overalls. Mr. Johnson charged him $3.50 for the overalls, and right then F. D. decided to put in a store which he did and eventually drove Johnson out of business.

Frank Wiles had a cooper shop in a log house about where the Jennings building now stands. He did a large business, making fish kits and butter firkins. It was quite the custom for settlers to milk large numbers of cows thru the spring and early summer while the grass was good, putting down the butter in brine. The butter would be hauled to market at Walla Walla in the fall and exchanged for flour or other necessities.

I think the Schluer brothers, "Gus" and "Theo", had a saloon in Joseph, and Mrs. J.. M. Mitchell ran a small eating house. E. T. Roup ran a little water power saw mill on Prairie creek, cutting logs most any place he found them and selling the finest clear rough lumber for from $6 to $8 per thousand feet, or most often trading for such things as he needed in the neighborhood.

Life was free and easy those days. There were not so many laws and few restrictions. For fuel the settlers went to the nearest timber and whacked down the first tree they came to and hauled it home. Fish and game were plentiful and free. In the late fall, say November, several good hunters from the settlement would establish a camp at Lick creek, or maybe across in the Grouse creek brakes. They would stay out two or three weeks and perhaps kill from 40 to 75 deer. Other neighbors would run strings of pack horses to and from the camp bringing in the meat, where it was divided impartially among the various families who had contributed horses, guns, ammunition, etc.

Deer were hunted, also, for their hides. The story was current that a winter or two previous, L. J. Pizell, together with a man (still a resident of the valley whom I will not name because of the present sentiment against such slaughter) killed over 1000 deer for their hides, one winter on the Imnaha. They obtained 75c to $1.25 each

and also marketed several four-horse loads of hams in Walla Walla. There was almost no money in circulation those days and not much need of money. Taxes were almost unknown. No gasoline was needed in our business, and no one had ever heard of a radio or moving pictures.

The death of John Hawk was much discussed at that time. He had been shot in his tent where he lay sleeping in camp on the Wallowa river near Lostine. He was killed instantly by a volley fired in the night, presumably from a bluff near by. Precisely who did the killing was never known. It was attributed to "vigilantes." A trial of several men at the county seat of Union county resulted in their acquital. Feeling ran high. The settlers were divided in their opinion. Some told us that John Hawk was a known and notorious cattle and horse thief, and that he richly deserved killing. Others equally sincere argued vehemently that John Hawk was a gentleman in every respect and never did a wrong thing in his life. It was long before the excitement of that affair with its resultant trial entirely died down.

Cattle rustling was quite prevalent those days. Many settlers in the Grande Ronde valley bought stock and turned them loose in Wallowa. These were not very closely gathered so some early-day stockmen naturally swelled their own herds by use of a long rope and a branding iron.

Much of the lower Prairie creek country was still open to homestead entry. It was a dry, squirrel-infested region not considered worth taking up. Some of the best farms in the valley are today in this section. Luxuriant bunch grass was everywhere. While there was as yet no large bands of sheep, a few small owners threw their lots together and herded on the hills close by. There were many bands of horses and cattle, almost every setler owned a greater or less number of these. The horses were allowed to winter in the hills whereever winter overtook them, but the cattle were gathered and driven to Big Sheep or the Imnaha canyons. Sometimes in extra severe winters the cattle would be brought to the valley and fed for a few weeks but for the most part they were left to live or die on the range. Later on as land was brought more into cultivation it became the custom to feed during severe weather.

The fall we arrived Sam Adams was moving to the Imnaha. He had quite a herd of cattle by that time and proposed to live with them on the low range. My brother Will helped him move and we rented the Adams farm on upper Prairie creek. A. C. Smith was building a new house on Alder Slope. Father got employment on the foundation and in building a fireplace. He also did some mason work for A. B. Findley at the Imnaha Bridge that fall.

We were pretty poor that first winter. By digging potatoes on the shares and helping gather in the neighbors' garden stuff we acquired a quantity of potatoes, cabbage, rutabagas, etc. Brother Will brought over a load of flour from Walla Walla. Father also bought a big, raw-boned ox from C. W. Meek. No reflection is cast toward Mr. Meek on account of the ox. We certainly got it cheap. I think $8 was the price, and it weighed about 1800 pounds. Having outlived its usefulness as a work ox at the age of 14 or 16 years we bought it for food. We youngsters never had a better time in our lives than we

did that winter. Altho we could not always eat the flesh of that ox it made good strong soup which the girls called "poverty sop."

L. J. Rouse taught the winter term of school on Prairie creek. Mr. Rouse was an excellent teacher, tho a rather severe disciplinarian. He promised me that I would either go to Congress or the penitentiary, but his prophecy was wrong on both counts. Mr. Rouse had for his assistant that winter a young man named Murat Blevans.

J. J. Blevans, with three sons, Murat, John and Duroc, lived on Prairie creek. "Rat," as he was called, later married my sister Jennie, and John married my other sister, Clara. Both families live at Joseph today.

Anything connected with land, and in fact almost all legal business had to be transacted at Union or La Grande. Suits at law of course were at the county seat, Union, where jurors and witnesses went, usually horseback. A lawyer named A. W. Gowan settled in Joseph the next year and soon thereafter S. A. Heckathorn, assisted by Mr. Gowing, started a local paper, the first in Wallowa valley. It was named "The Wallowa Chieftain."

We had one or two justices of the peace in the valley. Many stories concerning their interpretation of the law and the rough justice they handed out, were told long years after.

A Dr. T. J. Dean was resident physician at Joseph when we came and a Dr. Cobb looked after the sick on Alder Slope. As I remember Dr. Dean was a capable practicioner. Stories were told, however, illustrating the lack of knowledge of Dr. Cobb. One I remember. It seems Cobb had been treating the wife of a settler near by. One day the doctor met the husband and inquired how the wife was doing. The husband told Mr. Cobb that his wife was convalescent. "Huh," says Cobb, "that's nothing, don't be scared, I got medicine that will knock that in 24 hours." Dr. Gaily, a very good country doctor of the old school began medical practice on Prairie creek soon after.

A diphtheria epidemic swept Prairie creek one winter. This was about '85 and long before the discovery of anti toxin. Before the ravages of this deadly disease were checked between 30 and 40 children aged from 2 to 10 years were lost. One family, that of Doc. Tucker (father of Dave) lost three children.

A literary and debating society was organized on Prairie creek each winter. The school house would be crowded at every session. Youngsters would sing and "speak pieces," while gray beards argued the questions of the day. A protracted meeting was held every winter by some denominational minister, sometimes extending three or four weeks. Each settler had a rude sled with a box on it. The entire family would pile in and attend these meetings.

There was a dance every week some place in the valley which the young folks would ride or drive miles to attend. We lived in the rudest, most back-woods fashion, but there was not one percent of the talk of hard times that there is today.

These sketches are not claimed as historically correct but are only as I remember the things of which I write.