

The Oregon & Santa Fe Trails.

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Since the creation man's onward movement has been westward. He has watched the orb of day rise, run its magnificent course across the heavens, and sink in all its gold and purple glory in the west. It seems natural for humanity to follow a brilliant leader, and so man has girded himself and commenced his long race after the sun.

He set out from the Highlands of Central Asia with his face turned toward Europe. He bridged the Hellespont and built up historic Greece whose crystal atmosphere, perfect skies, fairy vales and landscapes of wondrous beauty united to inspire in her subjects, the spirit of artist, poet, or sculptor. Soon he reached Italy, and imperial Rome "who sat on her seven hills and from her throne of beauty ruled the world," sprang into her power as if by magic under his hand.

Further to the north a multitude came surging westward, with the Celts as vanguard followed by the Teutons, who were in turn jostled and crowded onward by the advancing Slaves. From these all the great nations of Europe were formed. Nor is this the extent of the influence of a westward

impulse. The beginning of the migratory movement dates back five thousand years and more. The dim and misty dawn of history chronicles the birth of a movement that has rippled onward like the waves of the sea. Even at the present time the cry is, "Go West, young man! Go West!"

"Go West" led to the discovery of America. It brought the Pilgrims from the oppression of a sovereignty on whose possessions the sun never sets, to the liberty of forest-bound New England.

A spirit of fearlessness and power is soon breathed into the child of the West. He fears nothing but oppression. He places freedom next to his God. So when the yoke of England became too heavy, the colonists would no longer bear it; they dashed it to the ground while the wind caught up the words, "America is free," and wafted them o'er seas and isles. It whispered through remotest lands, "America is free." It shouted in the ears of tyrants "America is free." Then a startled world learned that "Go West" indeed meant freedom.

The colonies had become the United States, a child in years, yet recognizing no other master than itself. At first its boundary

was confined to a narrow strip along the Atlantic coast, but its domain was not to be limited by the Alleghanies. The mysteries and terrors which lay beyond these protecting mountains were not left unfathomed long. From time to time immense tracts of land were added to the country until its dominion reached the Mississippi and then stretched away over rolling prairies, winding rivers, and lofty mountains to be washed by the peaceful waters of the Pacific.

The "Land of Promise" the "Garden of the World" includes the romantic country lying west of the Mississippi. It has been obtained a portion at a time by treaty, purchase or annexation. However acquired, every state or territory formed therefrom has proved a source of wealth either commercially or in its mineral and agricultural productions.

About 1846 when the great tide of emigration began to pour into Oregon, Westport and St. Joseph in Western Missouri were called the "jumping off places." Beyond, all was uncertainty. Hostile Indians lurked in the fastnesses of the hills. The terror of loneliness made the stout hearts of sturdy pioneers grow faint.

The advance of emigrants from the east

was made by water ways until St. Joseph and Westport landing were reached.

Just a few words about Westport. It is now Kansas City and the following is a partial description of the place as it was in 1850. "It is a queer place in which to build a town. Its site is simply a collection of river bluffs. It is all ups and downs. Some of the principal streets have been cut through high banks of clay leaving houses perched jauntily a hundred feet above the roadway." It is spoken of as the place where the "cows fell out of pasture and broke their necks" and where "one's door-yard was as dangerous as the brink of Niagara".

From this busy place hunters, settlers, explorers, and traders set out on the trail, which then took the place of water ways, for the far west. What a wealth of history there is clustered about that one word "trail". Fancy the thrill in the hearts of eastern friends when the word would reach them that a certain party had entered the trail at last. What nameless terrors they associated with the trail. With what trembling reluctant fingers they opened each letter from the West fearing

lest they should learn that some harm had befallen their loved ones. They would picture to themselves the wide, winding, hard beaten track, stretching away over lonely prairies through wild and treacherous forests for many weary miles; and at last emerging in a land where men did nothing but hunt, dig gold, and grow rich.

In 1822 the Santa Fe Trail was opened. This busy road was about eight hundred miles in length and it rose so gradually from its initial point at Westport until it reached the Rockies, that it seemed to the traveller to be almost perfectly level and not a bridge was built upon it throughout its length.

It is interesting to follow this road through the principal points to its terminus in Santa Fe. Starting from Westport the course across Kansas to Council Grove was south west; thence to the western border of Kansas the line of direction was almost straight west. It entered Colorado and continued southward along mountains and over deserts into New Mexico, where it crossed the Rockies and entered Santa Fe. This old trail which has done so much for Kansas is held sacred by her now. To keep it

from obliteration it is fenced throughout the greater part of its length. The Santa Fe Railroad for miles follows closely the original Santa Fe Route. Extensive trade between east and west was carried on over this line - the east sending cloth, foods, implements, and clothing, receiving in return furs, hides, tallow, beef and mutton.

The traders with their ponderous wagons would rumble away across Kansas, their long train winding like a serpent down the tortuous trail; creeping on for hours without a tree in sight; the scorching sun-rays beating down as if to set the very dust on fire: not a bird note in the sky - their only music the dull "thud" "thud" of the oxen's tardy feet upon the hard beaten track.

It may be your good fortune to know one of these old traders whose delight it is to help while away the long winter evenings by recounting his experiences upon the trail. He could say with Fremont:

"The whispering woods and fragrant breeze
That stirred the grass in verdant seas,

On billowy slopes,
And glistening crag in sunlit sky

Mid snowy clouds piled mountain high
 Were joys to me;

My path was over the prairie wide
 Or here on grander mountain side,
 To choose all free."

He will tell of the hardships endured, of the many narrow escapes from the Indians, and of the mad joy of the company when the first faint glimpse of Santa Fe told them that their long dangerous journey was almost at an end. He has known what it is to suffer from hunger, for often while travelling across the desert provisions became low. No game could be found in that dearth region and the men grew desperate under the pangs of hunger. The brave captain of the caravan urged them to keep on just a few more hours. These few hours passed by and the men on the verge of mutiny were horrified when the leader pointed to a low mound, covered with rubbish, saying, "If you are hungry, dig!" What open a grave to satisfy the craving for food? But the grave was opened and proved to be one of the caches in which was buried a supply of cured buffalo meat, provided for the use of starving

caravans. After one of the caches had been opened and the men learned what they contained there was no hesitation in opening it when the next one was reached. The greatest skill in covering these could not hide them from the quick detection of the Indians.

It is not so strange that the west has grown in so short a time into the wonderful country it is for only the bravest and strongest men dared face these hardships; and with hands like theirs to guide, the west quickly gained her place in the front ranks of prosperous and wealthy countries.

While the trader wagons were creeping back and forth along the Santa Fe road the northern part of Kansas did not lack for travellers. Watch the emigrants whom unseen fingers beckon to the Oregon trail, to whom unknown voices whisper of the wealth that lies beyond.

Imagine a train of five hundred picturesque, white topped wagons taking their slow way along the trail. The jovial rollicking Yankee must be there. His irrepressible spirits are ever bobbing up like a cork on the water. Nothing short of a scapless head could check

his merriment and make him see the serious side of life on the frontier. Then there were stern, grave New Englanders, and valiant Southerners in this company which halts now as the night comes on. The wagons are drawn into a circle, the guards set, the camp fires kindled and then the songs and jokes helped ward off the terror of what the night might have in store for them. Oad the sequel if the midnight air is rent by the wierd and terrifying warcry of the Indians. How hideous their painted faces when a fitful glare from the dying campfire falls upon them. The slaughter that follows is bitter left undescribed.

They follow the Kansas river until the Blue is reached. No would not follow its clear waters and pleasant valleys. The trail keeps its onward course along the Blue into Nebraska. More than once has the train halted by the banks of the quiet river to perform the sad rite of burial of one of its company, and as they moved sorrowfully away, sun-browned tearful faces turned lingeringly toward the grave which they would never see again.

In Nebraska the trail takes the course

of the Platte and North Platte to Fort Laramie in Wyoming. At this place the company would stop for rest and replenishment of provisions before entering the wild and barren Rattlesnake Hills, near the centre of Wyoming, whose treacherous ravines and dark caverns afforded hiding places for the Indians, from which they would dash with fiendish yells, add a few more "pale face scalps" to their trophies and then swiftly return to their caves without the loss of a single brave.

It is by no means true that all the tribes western travellers met were hostile. Many times the peace-pipe was brought out and smoked, and the white man's hand given in friendship to the Indian. The Rattlesnake Hills however were not the homes of peaceful tribes and the travellers felt that their painful anxious vigilance might be for a moment relaxed when the Hills were passed, and they rested by the Sweet-water for the night. This beautiful stream breaks through the Wind River Mountains in Western Wyoming forming what is called the South Pass. The cavalcade gladly takes advantage of this divide. They soon find themselves on the western side of the

mountains without having climbed them and are making their way over a more level country, almost a desert in places, to the western border of Wyoming. They cross it and enter the neighboring state singing, "We're coming Idaho," and Idaho stars curiously at the train of wagons just as though she hadn't seen hundreds of them winding across her plains, rivers, and mountains many times before. They pass through Fort Hall in the south eastern part of Idaho - a fort established for trading with the Indians and trappers who depended upon supplies brought them from St. Louis. On account of the long and dangerous journey these supplies brought fabulous prices, and Fort Hall lowered the expense by bringing supplies from the Pacific coast in shorter time and with much less danger to life. At Fort Hall the stars and stripes first floated on the breeze of the central wilderness.

Near the western border of Idaho is Fort Boise a short distance from Boise city on the Snake River. When this point is reached the company feel that their long wearisome journey is drawing to a close.

The story of this trip would not be complete without the description of a buffalo hunt. Towards sunset as the caravan travels northward along the Snake River, in the far distance the experienced eye of the hunter can see the herd coming toward the river for water. As the black leaping mass approaches, the clashing of horns, and the roar of thousands of hoofs come down on the breeze like sounds from a distant battle field.

The hunters take the swiftest horses and start in pursuit. At the first firing there is confusion in the herd, their great heads are lifted as if to question what this intrusion means - there is a moment's hesitation and then the prairie trembles under the mad stampede as the mass thunders away like an army in full retreat. Occasionally a wounded animal made furious by his pain turns upon his persecutor and the pursuer becomes the pursued. But soon the great clumsy creature staggers and falls, and if this has been a successful chase twenty more may lie dead upon the plain. The best of the meat is carried back to the wagons and there is no scarcity of food for a few days.

The company moves on up the Snake River until they reach its junction with the Columbia when they know their journey is accomplished; they stand on Oregon soil with thankful hearts that for the last time they have pitched their tents and built their camp fires in a treacherous hostile country; for the last time they have drawn up the wagons and set their guards to protect them from the murderous onset of the Indians. It was early spring when they left their home in the east, and now fall is spreading her brown carpet over the prairies and setting all the forests on fire with her gaudy colors. From a rocky prominence they look back over the trail and their eyes follow the stretch of timber along the river until it vanishes in the distance - all crimson and gold are the quivering leaves, just ready to lose their hold and flutter silently down to carpet the ground in their brilliant colors. They look away to the east and behold the bold rugged mountains, the deep defiles, the plains which lie between them and their old homes and it is little wonder that hearts grow sick with longing to be back again. But they came there to work and no time must be lost in useless repining. A place

for the home is soon selected and then each man finds employment in the mines, fisheries or fur trading and the struggle for wealth begins.

Now-how are the scenes among the Rockies. As Irving says, "the savage chief, plumed and painted and ever on the prowl, the traders' cavalcade winding over the plains, the buffalo chase, the hunting camp, the night attack, the mad stampede, the fierce skirmish among the rocks and cliffs all seem like the fictions of chivalry and fairy tale." The railroad has taken the place of the historic trail-Indian and buffalo flee before the panting screeching engine as though it were a living monster rushing out to destroy them-and it is in that it brings civilization in its train.

What has it all meant, the privations, the dangers, the tears, the graves along the grass grown trail. It has meant the extension of our free land until we can boast- my country spans a continent, and stretches its broad arms from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It has made a home for us here in the West- a loved and peaceful home; it has finished the great race course down which man has followed the sun and fulfilled the prophecy of Bishop Berkeley:—

"Westward the course of empire takes its way.
The four first acts already past.
A fifth shall close the drama with the day;
Times noblest offspring is the last."