The Oregon & Santa Fe Trails

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Once 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 Teutones, who were in turn foisted and crowded onward by the advancing Celts. 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 Pilgrim from the oppression of a sovereignty on whose possession the sun never set, to the liberty of forest bound New England. A spirit of fearless zeal and freedom is soon breathed into the child of the West. He fears nothing but oppression. He places freedom next to his God. Do 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 over seas and isles. It whispered through roughest 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 Alleghenies. The mysteries and terrors which lay beyond these protecting mountains were not left unexplored for 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 at a time by treaty, purchase or annexation. However acquired, every state or territory founded 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 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 waterways until St. Joseph and
Port Madison were reached.

Just a few words about Port Madison. 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
parching and broke their necks" and where
"one door yard was as dangerous as the
brink of Niagara."

From this busy place hunters, restless
explorers, and traders set out on the trail
which they took the place of waterways 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 terror they associated with the
trail. With what trembling reluctant fingers
they opened each letter from the trail.
last they should learn that some farm had be-fallen their loved one. They would picture to
themselves the wide, winding, hard beaten track,
stretching away over lonely prairies through
wild andtreacherous 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 Wyalpi until it
reached the Rockies, that it seemed to the trav-
eller 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.
Beginning from Wyalpi 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 south ward 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 help 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 torturous 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, thud" of the oxen's heavy 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 boughs
That shire the grass in verdant seas,
On hillowy slopes,
And glistening crag in sunlight sky,"

Those trees were like a dewy crown upon the head of the traveler.
Mid snowly clouds piled mountain high
The joy to me:
My path was o'er the prairie wide
Or hue 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 deathly re-
gion and the men grew desperate under
the pangs of hunger. The brave captain of
the caravans urged them to keep on just a
few more hours. These few hours passed by
and the men on the verge of mutiny were
horified when the leader pointed to a low
mound, covered with rubbish, saying, "If you
are hungry, dig!" What open a grave to sat-
sify 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
caravane. After one of the caches had been opened and the men learned what they contained there was no hesitation in opening it when the nest 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 trade wagons were creeping back and forth along the Santa Fe road the northern part of Kansas did not lack for travelline. Watch the emigrants whom unseen finger beckon to the Oregon Trail, to whom unknown voices whisper of the wealth that lies beyond.

Imagine a train of five hundred pie

duneque, white topped wagons taking their slow way along the trail. The jovial rollicking Yankee must be blue. His irrepressible spirits ran ever bobbing up like a cork on the water. Nothing short of a scalpelless head could check
his monument 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 halted now as the night came on. The wagons are drawn into a circle, the guards set, the camp fire kindled, and then the songs and jokes helped ward off the terror of what the night might have in store for them. But the sequel of the midnight air is rent by the weird and terrifying war cry of the Indians. How hideous their painted faces when a fitful gleam from the dying campfire falls upon them. The slaughter that follows is better left undescribed.

They follow the Kansas river until the Blue is reached. He would not follow its clear waters and pleasant vallies. 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 view no more 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 "false 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 smokes, and the white man's land given in friendship to the Indian. The Rattlesnake Hills however were not the homes of peaceful tribe and the traveller felt that their painful anxiety 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 with curiosity 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 bought 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 brigs 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 wanderlust 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 Drake River, in the far distance the experienced eye of the hunter can see the herd coming toward the river for water. As the black leaves mass approaches, the clashing of hooves, and the roar of thousands of hoofs come down on the drive 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 thunder away like an army in full retreat. Occasionally a wounded animal made furious by his pain runs upon his persecutor and the pursuer becomes the pursued. But soon the great clumsy creature staggles and falls, and if this has been a successful chase twenty non 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 Drake 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 last and now fall is spreading her brown carpet over the prairies and setting all the foliage 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 mountain, the deep defile, 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 thither to work and no time must be lost in useless repining.
for the home is now 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 trader's
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 searching
eagle as though it were a living monster
hurrying 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 peace-
ful 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; Whose noblest offspring is the last."