

Dust on their Petticoats

American Scene



Bicentennial Edition
for OUTDOOR DRAMA
"Dust on Her Petticoats"

W. H. D.
Koerner
1931

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Janice Poole Daniel



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Cover: **Pioneer Mother**. An oil on canvas by W.H.D. Koerner, 1932.

Left, bronze of **Pioneer Woman** by Bryant Baker, from which the PIONEER WOMAN MONUMENT at Ponca City, Oklahoma, was made. In the words of the sculptor: "I wanted to depict courage and faith as my pioneer woman stepped out without fear, doubt, or uncertainty—a moving force like the great nation itself." Photo Courtesy Woolaroc Museum, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

Shown on following page is a pen and ink sketch by William de la Montagne Cary. Thomas Gilcrease Institute Collection.

Introduction

Mrs. Balaam Gunter, an intrepid female who migrated in 1807 to Alabama because Georgia was getting too crowded, may have inspired the term "pioneer woman." Someone later referring to her by this title observed that "these women are as strong, as fearless, as able as the men. They carry civilization on their shoulders."

In the extravagant literary language of the 1870's, these ideas are echoed in a preface to *Woman on the American Frontier*:

"The story of woman's work in great migrations has been told only in lines and passages where it ought to fill volumes. Here and there incidents and anecdotes scattered through a thousand tomes give us glimpses of the wife, the mother or the daughter as a heroine and colonizer . . . a soldier and laborer, a heroine and comforter in a peculiar set of dangers and difficulties such as are met with in our American wilderness."

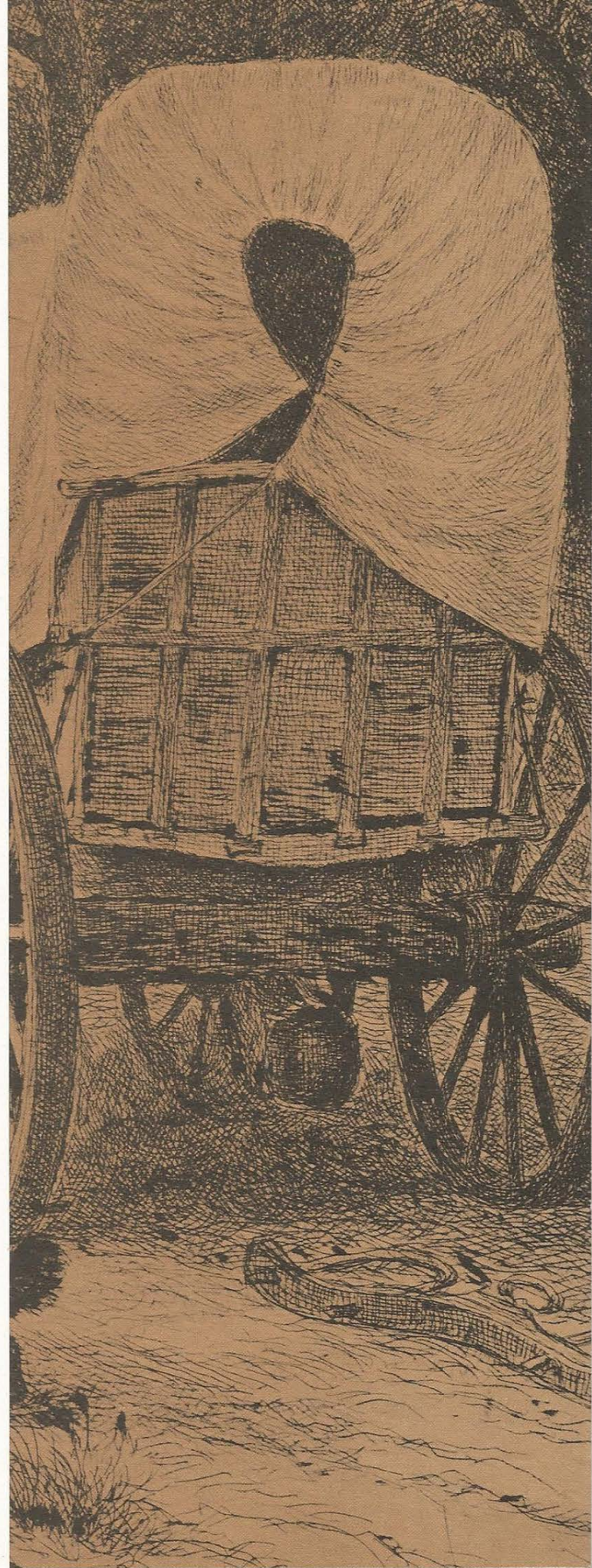
From this exaggerated interpretation of the pioneer woman's role in the great Westward Expansion, the pendulum swung to the point where her contribution was largely overlooked. But whether lionized or ignored, the pioneer woman *was there* on the westward-moving frontier, and she *did* share in settling and developing a new country.

And these questions arise: Why did she go West? How did she get there? What happened to her along the way? Would she do it again?

How certain pioneer women answered such questions is the focus of this issue of the *American Scene*. These answers are in their own words, as recorded in diaries, journals, letters, and reminiscences.

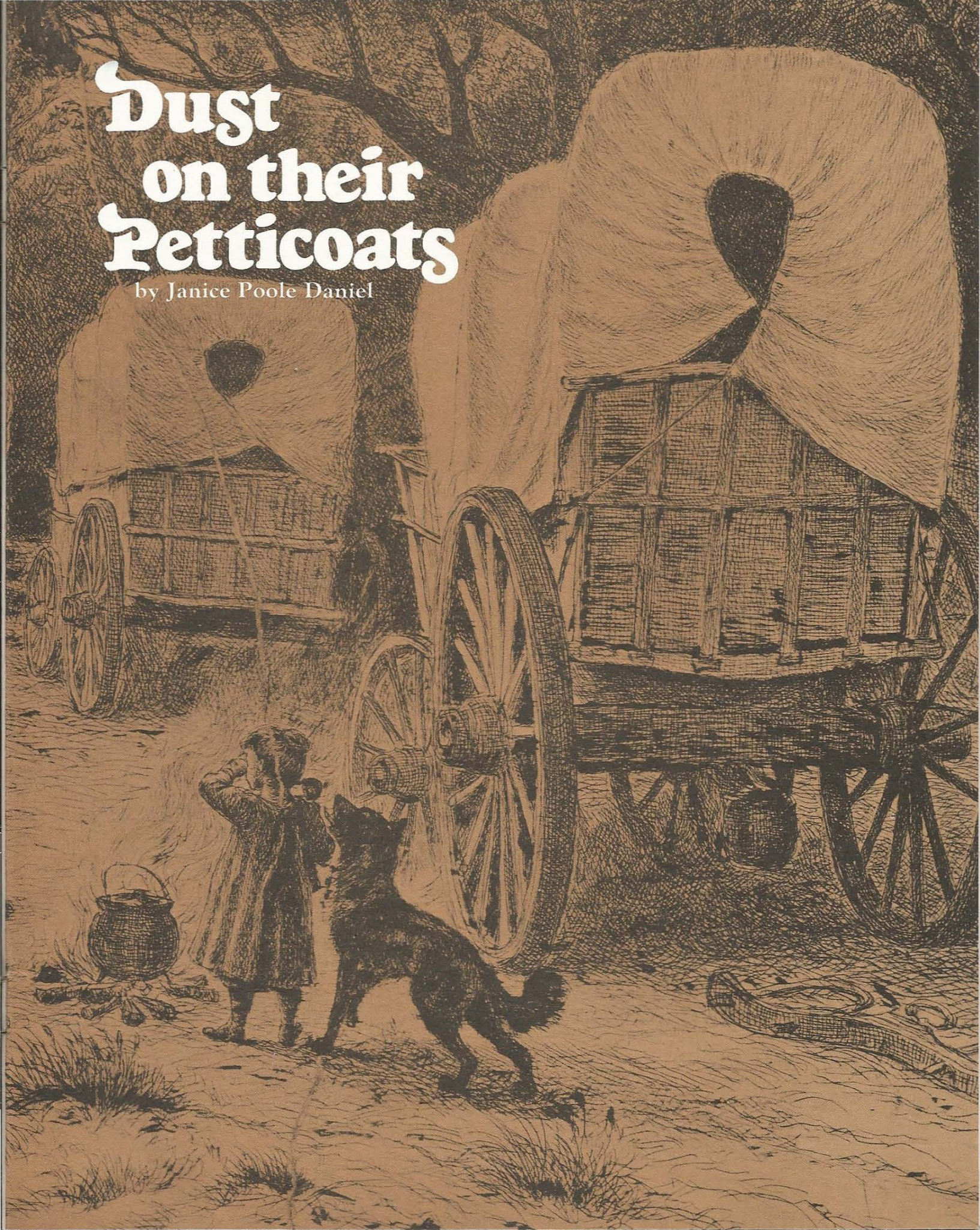
During the thirty-three years—between 1836, when white women first crossed the Rocky Mountains, to 1869, when tracks for a trans-continental railroad were joined at Promontory Point, Utah,—there occurred two great "rushes" for land in the Northwest, and for riches in the California and Rocky Mountain gold fields. In those, and other movements west, women rode horseback, jounced about on wagon seats—and walked! Indeed, all able-bodied members of families using ox-drawn wagons walked most of the time, and those with horse teams walked as much as possible. Some picked berries or wildflowers which bloomed in profusion, but most concentrated on gathering buffalo chips, their only fuel source in vast, treeless expanses of prairie.

As these pioneer women walked, their shoes, their skirts, their petticoats trailed dust—across half a continent!



Dust on their Petticoats

by Janice Poole Daniel



Narcissa Whitman

An earnest desire "to better the circumstances of others" by "taking the Gospel to far-away Indians" motivated the first white women to cross the Rocky Mountains.

In 1836, young Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding, with their missionary husbands, completed an epic-making trek from New York to Oregon Territory. For most of 1,900 arduous miles westward from Liberty, Missouri, the two women rode sidesaddle.

Although artist George Catlin, recalling his own experiences in 1832, warned that he would not take "a white female into that country for the whole of the continent of America," Dr. Whitman was convinced that "wherever a wagon could go, a woman could go." So the Marcus Whitmans, the Henry Spaldings, another missionary, three Nez Perce Indians, and two hired hands started west with two "waggons." At the Loup Fork of the Platte they joined forces with a fur caravan.

Their larger wagon had to be abandoned; only the light Dearborn made it over the Divide and on to Fort Hall. Hitherto, wheeled vehicles had only reached as far west as Green River, Wyoming.

Then their troubles mounted.

"July 25. Husband had a tedious time with the waggon today. Got set in the creek this morning while crossing, was obliged to wade considerably in getting it out. After that in going between two mountains, on the side of one so steep that it was difficult for horses to pass, the waggon was upset twice . . ."

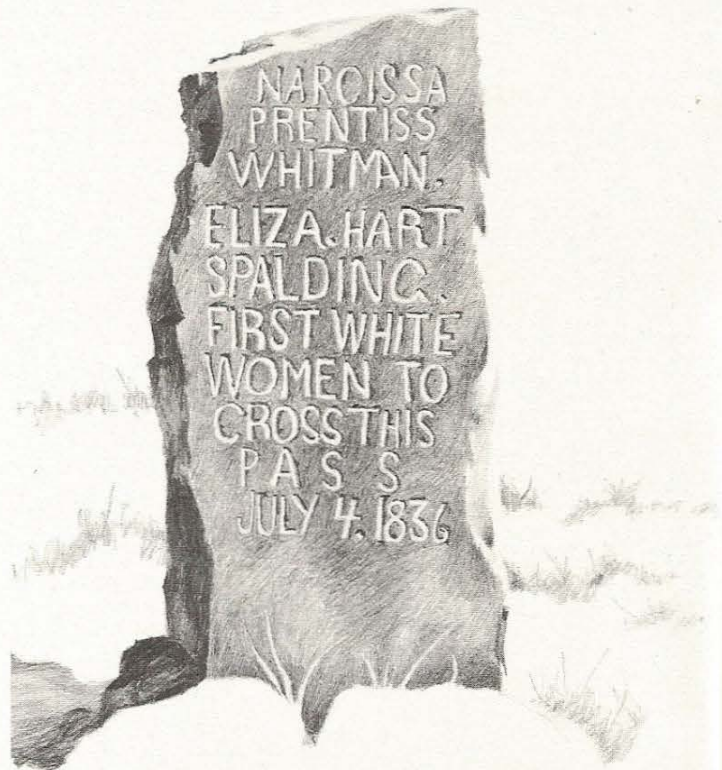
Three days later: *"One of the axle trees of the waggon broke today. Was a little rejoiced, for we were in hopes they would leave it and have no more trouble with it . . . Our rejoicing was in vain, however, for they are making a cart of the hind wheels this afternoon and lashing the forward wheels to it, intending to take it through in some shape or other."*

Dr. Whitman maneuvered the former Dearborn, now a two-wheeled vehicle, on to Snake Fort (old Fort Boise). There he finally left it, realizing the upcoming crossing of the Blue Mountains would be impossible for his "waggon-turned-cart."

Mary Walker

Just two years later, four more missionary couples followed the Whitman trail with the women again riding sidesaddle, although none of the four was an experienced horsewoman. Mrs. Elkanah Walker complained in her journal that "forty-five miles to ride in one day is hard!"

This same Mary Walker's candid notes on personality conflicts among their little group help to give a heroic enterprise the realistic touch of human frailty. Mary objected to Mrs. Asa Smith's "persistant whispering"—and to one of the men being "a hog at the table." Of the Rev. Cushing Eells she wrote: "the 'I' eclipses the whole horizon." Later she observed that "Mrs. S. is a great hand to hurry, but her



South Pass Monument . . . a humble marker honoring the first women to cross the Rockies. Pencil sketch by Douglas Crow.

Far Right, **Madonna of the Prairie.** An oil on canvas by W.H.D. Koerner, 1921.

husband is a real poke and last ready about almost everything."

The "Great Migration" of some thousand settlers to the lush northwest valleys under the leadership of Dr. Marcus Whitman came five years later in 1843. With reports of the Territory's wood, water, and game, "Oregon Fever" began to run high. Each spring wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters from Illinois, Iowa, and adjacent areas accompanied their menfolk to the Plains just as soon as the grasses were high enough to feed their stock en route. The skirts of these women would know the dust of the prairies as had the riding habits of Narcissa, Eliza, and Mary. ●



To California

In 1848 the news from Sutter's Mill flashed across the Continent and, rather than "Land!" the magic word became "GOLD!" Wagons turned southwestward off the Oregon Trail near Fort Hall and headed toward California, or later rolled due west from Salt Lake.

Sarah Royce

These earliest caravans were almost womanless, but some few wagons did transport wives and families as well as gold-seeking menfolk. Almost the last '49ers to cross the Missouri River were the Royces: Josiah, Sarah, and a small daughter. Although departures were usually earlier—late April or early May—because of deplorable roads and swollen streams they were over a month in crossing Iowa. Not until June 10 did their wagon, with its three yoke of oxen and one yoke of cows, make first camp on the trail.

Other wagons joined them, and while the men organized a formal company, the few women "were busy in cooking, washing, mending." Some women really wanted to turn back, but "seeing the uselessness of resistance they took up their part of the daily toil, in most cases, without complaining."

Troubles hit the Royces early. A sick old man whom Sarah had nursed in their wagon died—Cholera! All their belongings had to be disinfected: "cleansing the wagon, washing bed

clothes and thoroughly airing everything." Miraculously, however, only two more cases developed.

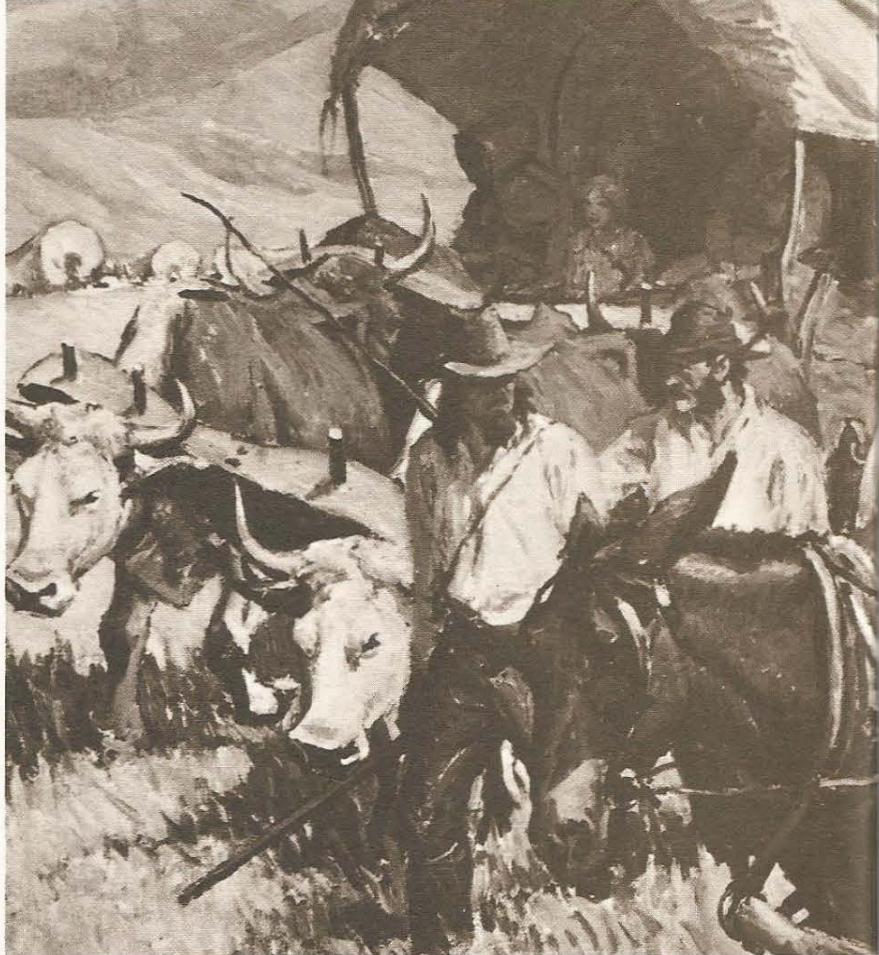
Difficulty begat difficulty. A cattle stampede damaged their wagons and the company captain put the problem plainly: "Three wheels broke all to smash, and fifty miles from timber!" A blacksmith was found among the members of the train, and using two proffered table boards, he repaired the damage in two days.

The company stopped at Chimney Rock to celebrate July 4. "In one tent a few gathered for a dance," commented Sarah, "in another several of us old-fashioned people enjoyed a cheerful 'sing.'"

As their party reached the mountains, it became difficult to find adequate feed for the animals because of the "great numbers of cattle preceding us this summer having eaten all feed near the road."

At Ft. Bridger the Royces decided against the safer route via Ft. Hall and left the others for the much shorter course across the desert west of Salt Lake. Josiah was aware that time was critical for traveling through the Sierra passes before snows closed them completely.

Since their favorite guidebook, John C. Fremont's *Travels*, was unhelpful for the new dangerous desert route, they procured at Salt Lake City a local pamphlet, *Best Guide to the Gold Mines, 816 Miles*, by Ira J. Willes which consisted of two small sheets of handwritten notepaper sewed together. With their lone





The Road to Oregon. An oil by W.H.D. Koerner.

wagon, plus one older man with a solitary ox, they started out across the desert. Later two young men with a horse and mule joined them. Such was their desert "train."

An ominous event occurred on the Carson Desert. Traveling before daylight to save time, they completely missed the Humboldt water holes and grass. They had no choice but to retrace fifteen laborious miles. Fortunately, their straw mattresses could be eaten by the weary oxen, and Sarah insisted on walking to ease their load. The desert seemed more forbidding because it was littered with the bodies of dead cattle, abandoned wagons, and scattered personal belongings. In one wagon the Royces found and claimed three sides of well-cured bacon.

Progress with the ox-drawn wagon was desperately slow. The Royce party would never have reached the Sierras in time, except for meeting two government "Relief Company" men who provided them with mules to carry them on to the goldfields. Most possessions had to be left with the now-useless wagon; Sarah chose to keep her Bible, her "Milton," and a tiny lap-writing desk. Riding astride a mountain mule and holding little Mary, she rode over the formidable Sierras to the Pleasant Valley gold mines.

Early in the journey Sarah had decided "the hard facts of this pilgrimage would require patience, energy, and courage." In the desert she added yet another—"confident faith."



Maneuvering wagons over the mountains was often accomplished only after much difficulty . . . "with wheels locked and ropes attached to the heavy wagons," according to Harriet Ward's journal, 1853. An oil painting in Olaf Seltzer's **Montana in Miniature** series illustrates the handling of this problem.

Thomas Gilcrease Institute Collection.



Settlers Moving. Sketch by William de la Montagne Cary.
Thomas Gilcrease Institute Collection.

California Crossing—South Platte, an oil painting on canvas by William Henry Jackson, 1867.
Thomas Gilcrease Institute Collection.

"The men were raising the wagon beds and fixing them upon blocks as high as the wheels and binding them

tight with ropes to the coupling poles and lower parts of the wagons, ready to ford the river. Many women were very nervous riding 'in wagons set up on stilts.' Wagons waited their turn, but by evening one could see on the north bank more than 200 wagons and some thousand men, women, and children, plus hundreds of horses and thousands of cattle."

Sarah Raymond, 1865

Harriet Ward

Four years later the William Ward family left Dartford, Wisconsin, to join a son already in the gold fields. Two horses pulled their "prairie schooner," and two ponies their smaller wagon, with the necessary spare horses behind. Once on the prairie, Harriet began noting emigrant graves along the road—"four at one place near the river," one of an Indiana woman who had died only eight days previously. Much of their route would be punctuated with such sad reminders.

Harriet disliked Nebraska, that "miserable, unpleasant" place in which they experienced violent electrical storms with "such thunder no one ever heard except upon the Platte River," cold downpours that soaked tents, wagons, and clothing, and bad roads that wearied the horses.

Among the Ward baggage was a satchel of medical supplies provided by a doctor back home. This was put to much good use; especially effective were its "Seidlitz Powders" and "Doctor's little doses of calomel."

Long and tedious days of washing and baking, using only buffalo chips for fuel, were offset by many pleasant "sings" around the evening campfire to the accompaniment of daughter Frankie's and friend Amelia's guitars. Favorite selections were *Mansion of Happiness* and *Begone, Dull Care*. Reading was another pleasant pastime. Miss Sarah W. had brought with her a sizable library, and by July 26, Harriet had read *Lady of the Lake* and *Lallah Rooke* so often they had become "old stories."

Despite the difficulties involved in maneuvering wagons over the mountains—sometimes "with wheels locked and ropes attached to the heavy wagons"—Harriet enjoyed the beauty around her. "Had I been gifted with the pencil of a Catlin, I would have presented you with sketches today of the mountain scenery... grand and magnificent beyond the power of words to describe."

THE WOMEN	DATE OF JOURNEY	DESTINATION
Mrs. Marcus Whitman (Narcissa) Mrs. Henry Spalding (Eliza)	1836	Oregon
Mrs. Elkanah Walker (Mary)	1838	
Mrs. Josiah Royce (Sarah)	1849	California
Mrs. Wm. T. Ward (Harriet)	1853	
Miss Mary Ann Bates Mrs. Wm. John Lewis (Jane) Mrs. Aaron Jackson (Elizabeth)	1856	Utah
Mrs. James H. Holmes (Julia)	1858	Colorado
Mrs. James Porter (Lavinia)	1860	Colorado or California
Miss Lucia A. Darling	1863	Montana
Mrs. Samuel Dunlap (Catherine)	1864	
Miss Sarah Raymond	1865	Montana or California
Mrs. William Fletcher (Ellen)	1866	Montana

Choking dust on the plains, across the alkali flats, and especially the "finest black dust imaginable" in the Bear River country, out-ranked mosquitoes, wolves, and even fear of the "wild Utah Indians" as Harriet's worries. She yearned for Sunday as it was observed back home.

She writes: "Sunday, Sept. 11: We found good grass and are to remain through the day, not to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, but to cut grass, as we are coming to a barren land where no grass is. Our Company all engaged, as usual, in washing, etc. Shall we ever be so situated that we can enjoy the privileges of the Sabbath and our beloved church again? ... A young gentleman gave us a call this eve and inquired what church I belonged to. I told him I was a member of the Episcopal church, but was obliged to wash on Sunday notwithstanding." •



To Utah

Many pioneer women moved west solely because of religious beliefs: they were Mormons. Their people had tried living in New York, Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri only to find opposition and even persecution at each location. Finally they determined to leave the United States and seek a place in the Far West to establish their new Zion. In July, 1847, the first emigrant train reached the "Place" in the Salt Lake Valley, and thither followed some 80,000 "Saints" in the next twenty-two years.

The Mormon Zion lured many converts from Europe, especially from the British Isles. By ship to Boston, and by railroad to Iowa, they streamed. In Iowa, because the necessary wagons were too costly, they built handcarts on which to transport their supplies, and often their little children. By walking and pushing the carts, they could make it across the plains without expensive teams and outfits. A few wagons were usually purchased to carry some supplementary provisions, as well as to transport the infirm and the elderly. Ten such "Handcart companies" of some 3,000 people trudged across prairies and over mountains to Utah in the years between 1856 and 1860. When the church could afford to send wagon train ferries back and forth across the plains for those unable to provide wagons for themselves, the handcart idea was abandoned.

The small handcarts, as described by some of those who "pushed or pulled" them, consisted of a framework riding on two wheels "wide enough to go in the wagon road if there was one," with a crossbar handle. Many of them were built on wooden axles, and frequent breakdowns delayed the caravans. Nevertheless, eight companies claimed to have made better time and to have had no higher loss of life than the wagon trains.

Mary Ann Bates

Two girls pulled the very first handcart into Salt Lake City in 1856. One was Mary Ann Bates who reported they had to wade across all the streams, and allow their clothing to dry on their bodies as they plodded on. One pilgrim, however, did not want to ruin her lovely new shoes, and "as soon as a stream of water came in sight, she would immediately proceed to faint and was put in one of the provision wagons and hauled across." After several such spells, one of the brethren "gave her a good ducking, warning her not to repeat this offense as she was as able to wade as the others."

Jane Lewis

Accounts of the handcart journeys emphasize the problem of adequate provisions. For members of the so-called "Starvation Company," such as William and Jane Lewis, the matter became critical. Jane later remembered that on the last days their rations had been drastically reduced to only three tablespoons of flour per person. This amount could prepare a day's supply of "flour soup." Francl, an 1854 California gold-seeker, provides the recipe for what he says was a "common dish." "Take two spoonfuls of flour and mix it with cold water, very thin. Pour this into boiling water and let stand until cool and thick. This makes enough for two persons."

Elizabeth Jackson

For the two groups in the Martin Company, it was suffering and tragedy. Because these emigrants had arrived so late from Europe and were further delayed in Iowa City by an insufficiency of carts, the 556 people (another member of this company remembered there





were 576), 146 handcarts, and seven wagons could not start their overland march until late August. This company included Elder Aaron Jackson, wife Elizabeth, and their three children. Heavy snows and the intense cold of autumn in the mountains caused greater suffering because considerable food, clothing, and bedding had been abandoned when carts transporting them became disabled.

With her husband among others ill of "mountain fever," Elizabeth described their last crossing of the Platte. The river was not only swift and wide, but "up to the wagon bed in its deepest parts"—and very cold. "My sister helped me to pull my cart with my three children and other matters on it. We had scarcely crossed the river when we were visited with a tremendous storm of snow, hail, sand and fierce winds. It was a terrible storm from which both the people and teams suffered. . . . My husband was put on a handcart and hauled into camp; and indeed after that time he was unable to walk, and consequently provision had to be made for him to ride in a wagon."

As the company wallowed through heavy snows along the Sweetwater River, Mr. Jackson died along with thirteen others. Frozen ground precluded normal burials, so the fourteen were piled up and covered with snow. Thus was Elizabeth left several thousand miles from her native land, "in a wild, rocky mountain country, in a destitute condition, the ground covered with snow, the waters covered with ice, and I with three fatherless children." But ten wagons of provisions were waiting for them at Devil's Gate, and despite unbelievable difficulties, the survivors of the heroic Martin Company pushed and pulled their remaining carts into Utah. •

Top, Pushing and Pulling to Zion, oil, by Carl Rakeman.
Photograph courtesy of the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Washington, D.C.

*"Some must push and some must pull
As we go marching up the hill,
As merrily on the way we go
Until we reach the valley, oh."*

Chorus, *The Hand-Cart Song*—words composed by J.D.T. McAllister, who was at the Iowa City outfitting point helping the first emigrants prepare for their handcart trek.

Left, one of the few known easel paintings by Carl Christian Anton Christensen, this work portrays one of the ten such "handcart companies" of some 3,000 Mormons who trudged across prairies and over the mountains to Utah between 1856 and 1860.

The Mormon Zion lured many converts from Europe, especially from the British Isles. Because the necessary wagons were too costly, they built handcarts on which to transport their supplies, and often their little children. By walking and pushing the carts, they could make it across the plains without expensive teams and outfits.

Courtesy of Brigham Young University

To Colorado

Julia Holmes

Gold discoveries in western Kansas Territory (later Colorado) in 1858 and 1859 set off a second stampede. The Lawrence train was one of those early on the trail; in it was Julia Holmes who was one of the first white women to reach Colorado. She, her husband, and his teen-age brother had left their Neosho River farm.

As the wagons with their forty-five men and two women rolled along the Santa Fe Trail and up the Arkansas River, Julia chose to walk. Eventually she was able to do ten miles daily and volunteered, unsuccessfully, to stand night guard duty. Her diary describes her trail attire: *"I wore a calico dress reaching a little below the knee, pants of the same, Indian moccasins on my feet, and on my head a hat."*

Upon reaching Pike's Peak early in July, the Holmeses determined to climb the mountain immediately. So Julia, wearing "bloomers," packed seventeen pounds (nine pounds of bread, the rest clothing and a quilt) up the long climb. From the summit on August 5 she wrote:

"In all probability I am the first woman who has ever stood upon the summit of this mountain and gazed upon this wondrous scene, which my eyes now behold." Since the Indians said none of their people ever climbed to the top, Julia was probably right.

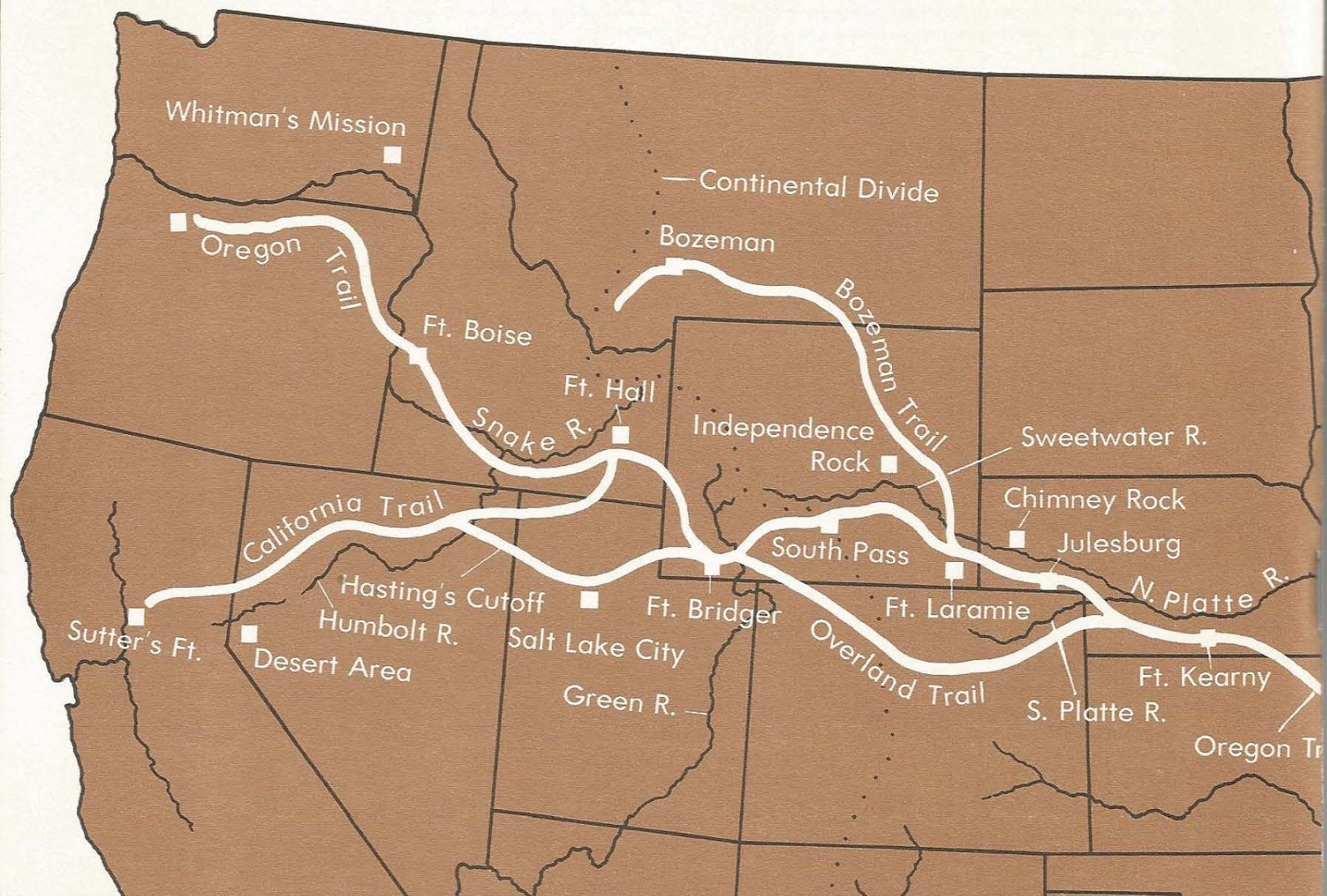
Lavinia Porter

Pike's Peak country also attracted southerner Lavinia Porter, but she and her husband, a small son, and two Porter brothers wanted new homes, not new wealth. If the area proved unsuitable, they could proceed to California.

Like the Royces, they chose three yoke of "strong, sturdy oxen," and they wisely determined to carry provisions for six months. Deciding what to take and what to leave behind necessitated loading and unloading several times. Lavinia scorned the recommended homespun or "linsey woolsey" for her wagon wardrobe because such fabrics were worn only by negroes back home. Instead, she made two blue cloth "traveling dresses" with an array of collars and cuffs. But these new clothes were soon discarded, and she donned "short wash dresses" and a "big Shaker sunbonnet."

On April 14, 1860, Lavinia's family drove their wagon off the ferry from St. Joseph, Missouri, and on to the trail west. Living arrangements on a prairie wagon were interesting:

"As we had no tent, we slept in the wagon, my brother taking the rear end for his 'Pullman,' spreading his blankets above the bales and boxes . . . James, myself and our little son occupied the front of the wagon. We had a huge old-fashioned feather bed that made sleeping



above the boxes and barrels a trifle more comfortable."

Two things about the prairies they crossed greatly impressed Lavinia: the severity of the electrical storms, one "frightful in the extreme, as we were so unprotected from its fury;" and the hundreds of new-made graves they passed in buffalo country.

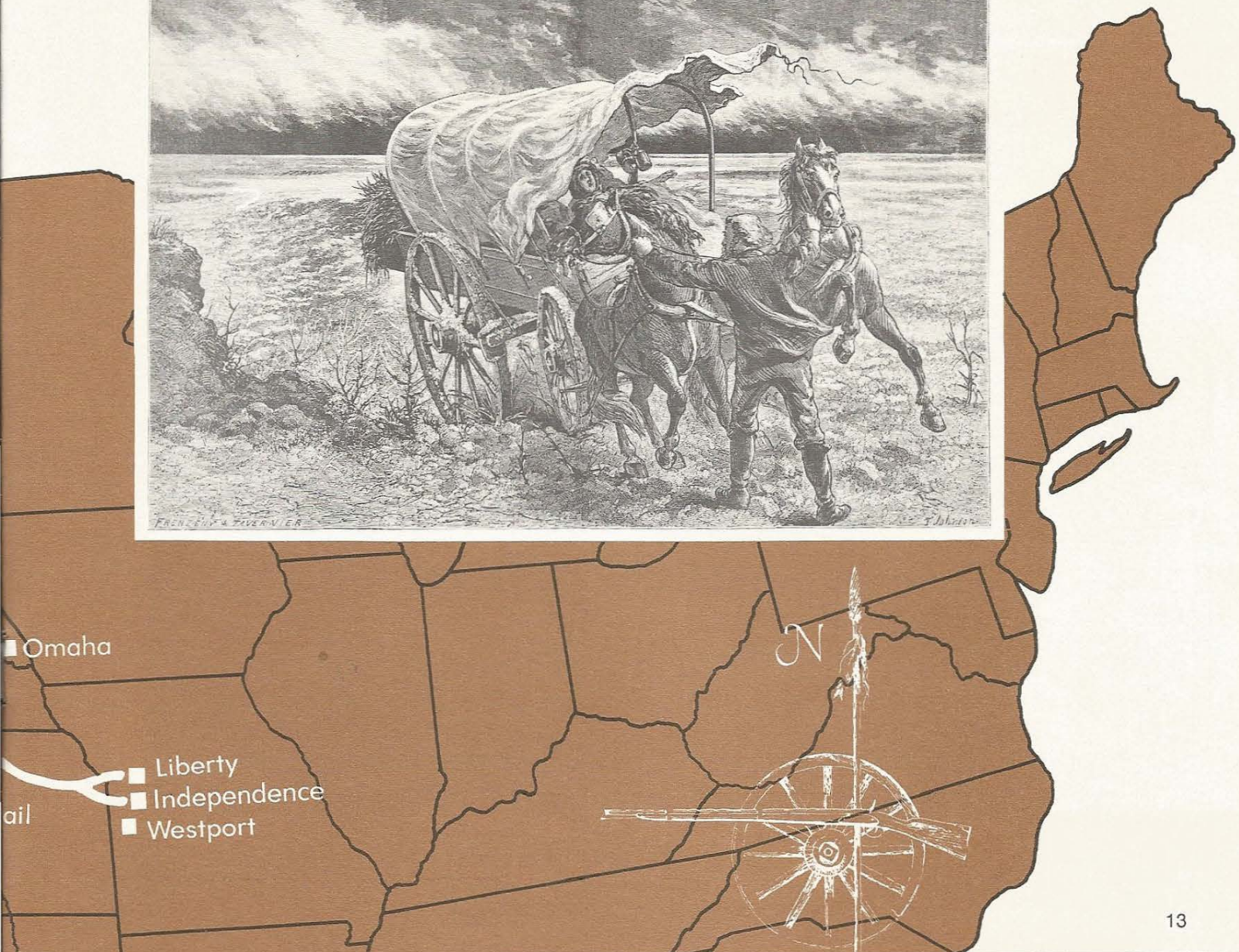
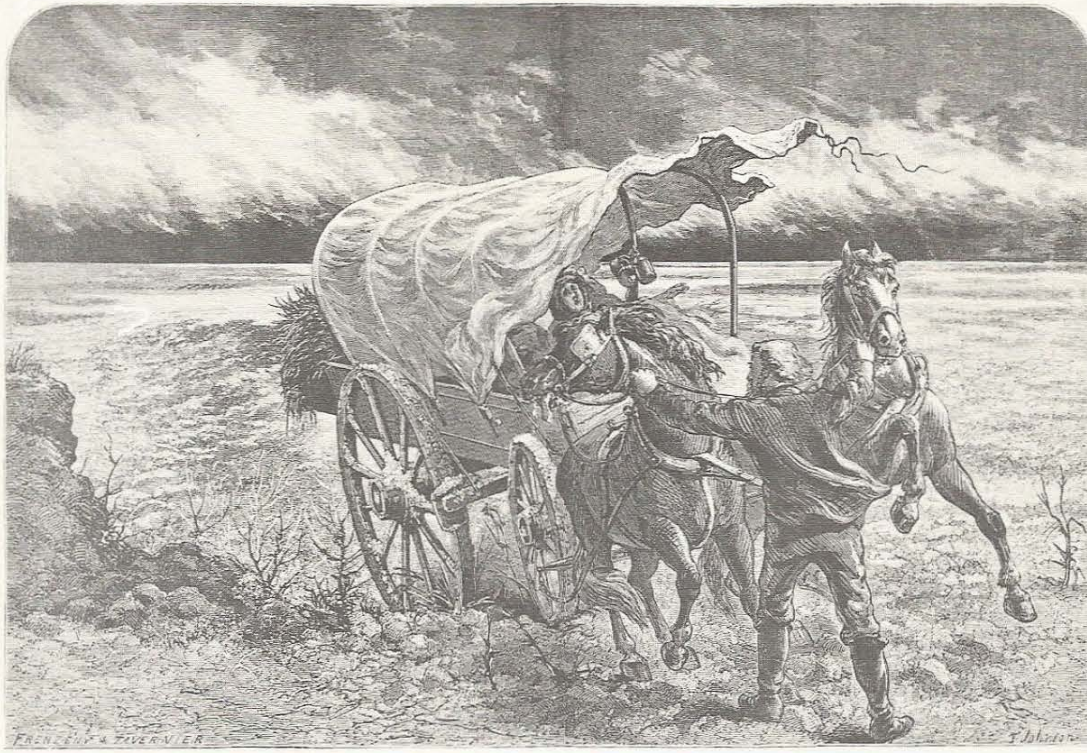
"One day we overtook a belated team on its way to one of the distant forts with only a man and his wife who was quite ill in the little tent, having given birth to a child a day or two before which lived only a day. The father had put it in a rude box and laid it away in its tiny grave by the wayside. The poor mother was grieving her heart out at leaving it behind on the lonely plain."

Once across the Republican River, the Porters met a "large train of Illinois and Missouri families emigrating to California by way of Ft. Kearney where they could strike the old military road," and Lavinia's family decided against Colorado in favor of California.

At Ft. Laramie, for their own safety, the Porters were herded in with some wagons from Arkansas and Tennessee. Once out on the trail again, many of this company proved so crude in both language and behavior that Lavinia's family deliberately let their wagon lag way behind, preferring to chance what might come with the Sioux—alone. And the Sioux did come, but only to enjoy such delights as seeing themselves in Lavinia's handmirror, or to get relief from a painful toothache with some of Lavinia's drops." Indeed, one brave made himself their personal escort, and traveled with the Porters until danger of serious attack was past. Only then did he return from whence he had mysteriously appeared. •

A Prairie Wind-Storm—Drawn by Frenzeny and Jules Travernier for a contemporary newspaper account.

cartography by Douglas Crow



To Montana

Lucia Darling

Again in 1862 came the news, "GOLD DISCOVERED!"—this time at Grasshopper Creek in the Northern Rockies, with other rich deposits found in Alder Gulch the next year. Gold-seekers rushed northward into new boom-towns like Bannack and Virginia City. These two areas, part of Idaho Territory in 1863, became part of Montana Territory in 1864.

One of the 1863 wagon trains contained three people very important to future Montana's history: Sidney Edgerton, soon to become first territorial governor of the new Montana Territory, his twenty-four year old niece, Lucia Darling, who was going to Montana to open its first school, and Willie Sanders, future first Montana Congressman.

Coming from Ohio by boat and train, the Edgerton family reached Omaha on June 6 to prepare for the three months overland journey. None of the party knew how to drive ox-teams. To make matters worse, the oxen they acquired had not been broken to yoke and were determined "to go every way but the right way." One week of lessons from a teamster proved necessary.

Wagons were packed so that items could be "put back from the front during the day." Chairs could be set in, or they could "sit, or lie, on the bed at the back of the wagon."

With only a stop of an hour or two at noon, they could expect "to get into camp in time for supper, do up the work, get the cows milked and tent pitched before dark." Lucia sometimes rode horseback, but often walked, and her "riding-habit" as well as her "walking-suit" consisted of a calico dress and a corded sunbonnet.

Five miles out of Omaha, Lucia much later recalled, "was the open, undulating prairie, vacant except as an occasional log house, usually deserted, demonstrated that the occupant had been lured yet farther west. Fremont and Columbus were two settlements containing perhaps a dozen houses, unpainted and unenclosed, and the great valley of the Platte stretched thence westerly for six or seven hundred miles unoccupied, save as Ft. Kearney and Ft. Laramie interrupted the solitude."

She sighted numerous Mormon parties moving both east and west. One had about 200 wagons "going to Omaha for some of their faith who come from all parts of the world."

On June 23, the Edgertons received news of current fighting between the Sioux and U. S. soldiers aided by the Pawnees. "Some said there was no danger, while others thought that there never was more cause to fear."

Although the emigrants made necessary defense plans, most of their Indian encounters were of this nature:



"July 8. Camped in a nest of Indians, who have gathered around, and are sitting on the ground looking at us, and we at them. They stopped the wagon . . . ahead of us, and would not let them come back to us, or go on, until they were given all the bacon, flour, etc. they wanted, but did not get. They made motions to us that we interpreted to mean if we did not give them what they asked for, they would scalp us. One big, ugly looking Sioux took Wilbur aside, and made him understand there were 1,600 Sioux up the river, and if we did not give him, the speaker, all the 'shug, bisookit, and hoga-meat' he wanted, 'me scalp us.' We sat on the ground and laughed and talked, and sang and talked, as though we did not fear him, and when an old chief peered into the wagons, Uncle Sidney showed him the sixteen shooter guns, and fired one off sixteen times to show him how it went. Finally we hitched up our teams and started on unmolested."

The Platte countryside, with all its wild-flowers, was beautiful, and Lucia often reported, "We had a very lovely day." Even after all day and all night rains she writes: "Everything is wet in the wagons. Got together in our tent and sang; told stories; and had a jolly time. By digging a ditch around the tent managed to keep dry."

Recreation for the wagoners came in impromptu horse races, and evening story-

telling, and "sings." The latter, starting with Sunday tunes, usually ended with something rather lively, such as *Fairy Belle* and *Down the River*. Mr. Everhard's violin provided accompaniment (but Lucia admitted to enjoying his "mush" more than his music).

Unusual in this diary is that regular mention is made of washing, not only one's clothes, but also one's self: "All took a good bath at the Wood River," and "I put on a bathing suit, and took a bath in the Platte" are typical comments.

Stopping at Ft. Laramie to get their mail from home, Lucia saw nothing but "soldiers, Indians, and papooses. The Ohio soldier boys were glad to see girls, from Ohio especially."

Beyond Laramie they heard of a wagon train "on the new route to Denver that is surrounded by Indians and cannot move . . . The command at Laramie has forbidden the

Left, Mesa Vigil, oil, by W.H.D. Koerner.

A Doubtful Visitor, an oil painting by Charles M. Russell.
Thomas Gilcrease Institute Collection

"Inscriptions were common on the wagon covers. Sometimes the owners themselves placed them there; sometimes others in the train put them on."
Starbuck, *Crossing the Plains*, 1852.



troops to help them." Lucia noted the "new route" had been "constructed by the Government to divert emigration from the Oregon Trail through Utah as a result of the Mountain Meadow Massacre." A week later came the news that those emigrants finally turned back. "If they had shown more pluck," observed Lucia, "they might have gone on . . . If any woman of the train had been the captain, they would have passed through."

"Wrangling tongues" proved a real problem on a wagon train. "We had been told," noted Lucia, "before we started on this journey that we would need to lay in a good stock of patience, but had no idea such a quantity was needed. Little faults have grown to be immense in the sight of others at times, and a spirit of contention exists."

On August 2, two welcome items were added to the regular menu. "Have found wild currants in plenty on the banks of the Platte, of which we have made very good sauce—

of the berries, not the river!" With the sauce was served the first homemade bread of the six weeks journey thus far. "Cousin Hattie set the sponge last night, and made the bread up in a large tin tub this A.M., setting it in her wagon at the foot of the bed to let it rise. When Willie Sanders woke from his nap, he fell into the nicely covered bread dough, which did not hurt him or the bread either as the bread was covered and had to be kneaded down several times before noon. Then we borrowed all the stoves in camp and baked it before the afternoon drive."

In "alkali country" Lucia decided to sample the stuff. She discovered it was salt, and the company gathered a big supply. Upon finally reaching Bannack, they discovered there was a "salt famine," and all the Edgertons had to use was what Lucia had found on the road.

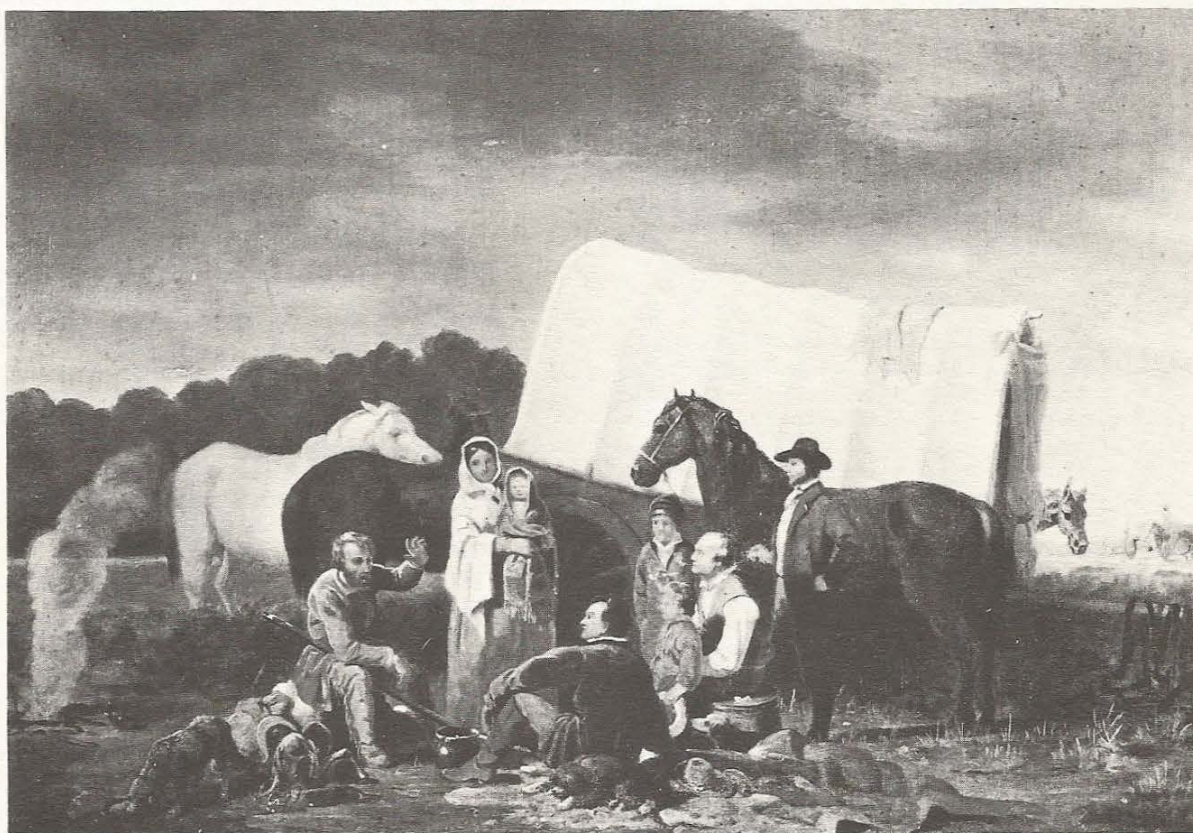
Lucia insisted on standing guard one night when she had to stay up anyway to cook "a bushel" of fried cakes. "I sat up and watched the cattle and the stars all night with our Indian pony for company. The number of Indians and deer I saw on each side of the camp among the willows in the moonlight, I did not count, but have decided today in broad daylight that it was all my imagination. Uncle Sidney set his gun out of his tent, and I kept my revolver close to me. Wonder what I would have done if I had seen either a bear or an Indian?"

Pioneer Woman. A bronze by John Gregory. Woolaroc Museum, Bartlesville, Oklahoma





Photograph courtesy of the Denver Public Library Western Collection.



Old Scout's Tale. An oil on canvas by William Ranney.
Thomas Gilcrease Institute Collection.

Kate Dunlap

Also headed for Bannack, one year later in 1864, were Samuel Dunlap, druggist, and his new wife, Catherine. They entered the plains May 27—with some 1,100 miles ahead, according to their copy of Campbell's *Guide*. Travel was heavy along the Platte; indeed, the line of emigrants Kate noted on June 4 stretched over a mile in length, and later they camped along with 500 other wagons.

Some 300 miles out from Omaha, they were in "Indian country." They formed a company with other wagons, of which Mr. Dunlap was elected captain. At a Sioux village of "about forty wigwams," several naked children followed them "crying for bread." When they stopped to camp a mile and a half from the village, Kate wrote: "An old chief came to us to forbid us camping on their pasture, claiming that all this land belonged to the Sioux, that God had given it to them and we must move." And move on the emigrants did. "Numerous, intelligent, powerful, treacherous, and hostile" summed up the Sioux for Kate.

On the Sabbath, the wagons "lay by" to rest the horses, but for the women it was "wash day, cooking day, and general regulating day."

Along the miles of "heavy going that try the stuff of the teams" in the sandy hills Kate had walked. And she walked across the mountains too, as did everyone who was able. "The roughest roads and the most rugged mountains" she determined were the Bear River Mountains—yet their wild beauty far outweighed their difficulty.

Finally, on August 16, the Dunlaps reached Bannack, and Kate's last entry reads: "We are thankful to our Heavenly Father that he has brought us safe to our journey's end. Many were attacked by Indians just before and after us. From the time we left Ft. Laramie till we reached Black Foot we never even saw one."

Sarah Raymond

The Raymond family, consisting of two young men, their mother and sister Sarah, set out May 1, 1865, "to better their circumstances." After some tedious going across Iowa, they camped opposite Plattsmouth along with crowds of other emigrants, waiting to be ferried across the Missouri River. All the people gathered around an immense campfire, violin and flute appeared, and familiar songs rang out. In this war year, *Just Before the Battle*, Mother was popular.

Sally met two men who had started for the Montana gold fields, but having heard "such stories of Indian depredations being committed on the Plains, they sold their outfit for what they could get" and were returning home on horseback. "How I pity any man who has so little grit," wrote Sarah. "God can, and will, take care of us as well on the plains as anywhere."

Oxen pulled their heavy supply wagon, but horses drew the spring wagon in which they rode and lived. Sarah's pony was used as relief for the horses. So sometimes Sally rode horse-

back, or drove the spring wagon, or walked—as was necessary. Once she rode as a guest in an ox-drawn wagon and decided it was most undesirable as a way to travel all across the prairie, "but for a half a day, once in a while, it was a pleasant change."

"It is wonderful how soon we have learned to live in a wagon," Sarah wrote. "Up with the birds each morning. Mother prepares breakfast, while I roll up the beds and cover closely to protect them from the dust; one of the boys milks the cows . . . I strain the milk into an old-fashioned churn . . . and fix it in front of the freight wagon, where it will be churned by the motion of the wagon. Mother washes the dishes, we prepare lunch for our noon meal. I stow it in the grub-box under the seat in the spring wagon, the boys take the pipe off the little sheet-iron stove, empty the fire out and leave it to cool, and stow it on a shelf at the back of the wagon."

One day the Raymonds camped within sight of twenty corrals, each of them comprised of from twelve to twenty wagons. Two women from one of the other trains called upon Sarah's group, but they proved to be "Becky Sharp" types: "loud, boisterous, and unladylike," speaking to "strange gentlemen with all the familiarity of old acquaintance."

By early June along the Platte River they entered country "infested with Indians" on the warpath. Here the Government required all emigrants to organize into companies of from forty to sixty wagons, and the Raymonds joined the Hardinbrooke train. All companies were enjoined to stay close together on the road and in camp. "As far as the eye can reach, before us and behind us, there are wagons, wagons, wagons; some drawn by oxen, some by mules, and some by horses. All fall into the slow gait of the oxen. Wagons stopped at noon and evening, always in the same order."

The wisdom of this procedure was underscored for the emigrants by the sight in one location of eleven graves of men killed by Indians the previous August. Only one man had survived. Two wives had been taken prisoner, but later rescued. Moreover, every station and ranch building the Raymonds passed had been destroyed. Indeed, the Hardinbrooke train wondered gratefully at their continued good fortune in never being attacked—while wagons only a little ahead or not far behind were beset by rampaging Indians. An army officer solved the mystery: the McMahan train traveling just next to the Raymond party was transporting a steam engine. With all its iron pipes sticking up, the portable machine vividly suggested an awesome multiple cannon which the Indians feared could surely "kill them by the hundreds."

To Sarah's joy one Sunday, the emigrants finally had a "preaching service." "Some sat in chairs in the shade of the wagons, some under umbrellas, some in carriages and light wagons," while the minister aptly compared their situation to that of the Israelites in the wilderness.

July 4 was appropriately celebrated, even in a cottonwood grove. Two swings were quickly



Sketch by William de la Montagne Cary.
Thomas Gilcrease Institute Collection.

"The desert seemed more forbidding because it was littered with the bodies of dead cattle, abandoned wagons, and scattered personal belongings."
Sarah Royce on the Carson Desert, 1849.

hung, and lemonade flowed—but *without* ice. The festive menu featured roast antelope with oyster dressing, dried fruit sauce, and cake with custard. The dessert finished the egg supply which had been packed in salt. "I believe they would have kept another month," marveled Sarah.

A succession of troubles followed. Terrific dust, strong with alkali, "almost kneedeep in places" increased the incidence of scurvy. Much colder weather brought more mountain fever, and runaways damaged wagons. All such things Sarah faced resolutely; what she bitterly resented were exorbitant tolls charged emigrants at ferries and bridges. Refusing to pay four dollars for "a rickety old ferry-boat" over the North Platte, she and her brothers drove their wagons across the treacherous stream. But they could not avoid ferry charges across the Snake River, or paying the ten dollars required to go through Canon Road.

At Rock Spring, the Raymonds chose the longer, lower road to Montana because it was safer and better supplied with pasture and water.

Two freighting partners in the Hardinbrooke Company quarreled violently, with Hostetter finally killing Frasier. A trial swiftly followed. The men on some four wagon trains encamped together elected a judge, jury, prosecuting and defense attorneys, and tried Hostetter for

murder. The defendant was acquitted, and the victim buried—all this on the same day.

Some of Sarah's traveling companions were most interesting: her friend Cash who expected the cross-country journey to be one long continuous "jolly picnic;" Mr. Kerfoot who believed the Government was about to smash, so was taking gold, wife, and twelve children out of the States; Mr. Ryan who was escorting his four eligible daughters to the West where there were "more men and fewer women;" and the woman who thought "crossing the plains and mountains in a wagon is a sad, discouraging, never-to-be-repeated experience."

Reaching Virginia City on September 5, the Raymonds located a two-room cabin for eight dollars a month. Sarah noted triumphantly, "It is neat and clean, which is a comfort. Men have not bached in it!"

Ellen Fletcher

The last of our wagon pioneer women is Ellen Fletcher. A wedding journey from Buffalo, New York, to Summit in the Montana goldfields took William and Ellen, with some of their family, by train and steamboat to Bellevue, Nebraska, in 1866. The rest of the journey was by horse-drawn wagons.

As plains travel went, the Fletchers' journey was an easy one. William had traveled to



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Pioneer Woman. A bronze
by Stirling Calder.
Woolaroc Museum, Bartlesville, Oklahoma

Montana before and knew the value of careful planning and good equipment.

Ellen sometimes rode sitting in a large armed camp chair set up permanently in the wagon. At other times she rode a spare pony. But in the sandy bluffs area that was so difficult for the teams, she walked.

Sunday after Sunday, except for Ellen's family, all the women did laundry. Despite Ellen's objections, one Oregon woman who had crossed the Plains before indicated that because of her past experience, she for one would wash whenever she got a chance.

One day on the trail word flashed up and down the wagons "Mr. Smith has killed his wife!" The train stopped immediately, and some men wanted to hang Mr. S. then and there. But the woman was only stunned, not dead. "Her brutal husband had struck her with the butt of his whip." From then on he had to travel in the middle of the train where everyone could watch him.

Midway on the Plains, the Fletchers had determined to take a new, much shorter road to Montana called "Bozeman's Cut-off," and Ellen's diary is the only known feminine account of travel over this notorious trail.

"The Indians don't like to have us travel this road as it is called their best hunting ground. They want to have this road thrown up and not allow any travel there. They say that they will give up anything else, but this they will not."

Oddly enough, the Fletchers entered this dangerous route, later aptly called the "Bloody Bozeman," at the one time it was fairly safe because a conference was then being conducted at Ft. Laramie between Colonel Carrington and the Sioux chiefs concerning the continuance of the road.

Indeed, to Ellen, mosquitoes, toothache, a broken axle, and plain bone-weariness proved much more troublesome than Indians. True, she saw many of them, some armed, but most of them wanted only "whist" (whiskey) or "to swap." None seemed interested in scalps!

A short while before reaching Virginia City, Ellen Fletcher reported visiting briefly the Gay ranch near the Madison River. The small but neat cabin contained a homemade bedstead, large cupboard and table—and several children. The youngest answered to the name of "Jeff Davis," and Ellen noted that "his mother told him not to be ashamed of his name, so I could see what *their* sentiments were." ●

Postscript

To adapt a phrase from Kate Dunlap's perceptive pen: *"There is no place in the world where the qualities of a man will show themselves sooner than crossing the plains, let them be good or bad."* And she might well have added: *"And that goes for the ladies, too!"* ●

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JANICE POOLE DANIEL, author of *Dust on Their Petticoats*, has long had an interest in "living history." . . in her own words, "a genuine interest in what really happened, rather than in 'what should have happened' versions by which history is often presented.

Her interest in the western migration was really awakened by docent service at Gilcrease. "I fell in love with the library, and I kept looking for women's faces in the art of that period. Women were there," Janice grew more curious to learn their interpretations of what they experienced as they, with their menfolk and children, followed the path of the sun over trails that led to the settlement of the American West.

For Janice, this led to a year of research, correspondence and travel to libraries and museums in Oklahoma, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah. Much of what she learned was from old journals which have not been published; other information came from old, out-of-print books, contemporary newspapers, and the like. Another result was the beginning of Janice's personal collection of books pertaining to this field.

A graduate of the University of Kansas with an A.B. degree in liberal arts and an M.A. degree in English literature, Mrs. Daniel continued advanced graduate work at Columbia University.

She is immediate past president of the Gilcrease Institute Women's Service Group—the Gillies—and is presently serving as docent chairman. A member of the Tulsa School Board for six years, she served as its vice president for half of her tenure.

Mrs. Daniel is a charter and life member of the Tulsa Boys' Home Senior Women's Association, a sustaining member of the Junior Auxiliary of the Children's Day Nursery, life member and former president of the Salvation Army Auxiliary. One of the organizers of the St. John's Hospital Auxiliary, Mrs. Daniel has a total of over 2,500 hours of service there. She continues to be active in the adult education program of First Presbyterian Church. She has just been elected to the Gilcrease Institute Board of Directors.

Back cover: Photograph of Emigrant Train in Wyoming, courtesy of the Denver Public Library Western Collection.

Emigrant Trail at Independence Rock, Wyoming Territory, by William Henry Jackson, 1929. Utah State Historical Society Collection.

"A stupendous formation said to cover a hundred acres, with a great many names painted wherever a smooth surface presented itself."
Lucia Darling, 1863.



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