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Article Title: Overland to the Gold Fields of California in 1850: The Journal of Calvin Taylor

Full Citation: Burton Williams, ed., "Overland to the Gold Fields of California in 1850: The Journal of Calvin Taylor," *Nebraska History* 50 (1969): 125-149

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1969CTaylor.pdf>

Date: 10/10/2015

Article Summary: This section of Taylor's journal describes his trip from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie. He comments on the beautiful scenery of the western prairies and the fresh graves of travelers along his route, where he met many returning emigrants, discouraged and ill.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Calvin Taylor, Charles Wesley Taylor

Nebraska Place Names: Fort Kearny, Platte River, Ash Hollow, Chimney Rock, Nimahaw Creek (Nemaha River), Little Blue River, Scotts Bluff

Keywords: Calvin Taylor, Wright and Company, cholera, Sioux Indians

Photographs / Images: sketch of Fort Kearny; photographs: Courthouse Rock and Jail Rock, Chimney Rock

OVERLAND TO THE GOLD FIELDS OF CALIFORNIA IN 1850:

The Journal of Calvin Taylor

By BURTON J. WILLIAMS

Calvin Taylor and Charles Wesley Taylor, his nephew, departed from their native city of Cincinnati, Ohio, and headed for the gold fields of California on April 27, 1850. Their journey was carefully chronicled by the elder of the two migrants, Calvin Taylor, beginning with their date of departure and concluding with their arrival in California in September, 1850.

They boarded an Ohio River steamer on April 27 and reached St. Louis on May 1. They spent the afternoon of the day of their arrival inspecting the city. The next morning, May 2, they departed St. Louis by boarding still another steamer, the *St. Paul*, and headed up the Missouri

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River for St. Joseph, Missouri, an important point of departure for those traveling overland to the California gold fields. They reached St. Joseph on May 9, after having made a brief stop at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, on the preceding day. They remained in or near St. Joseph for more than two weeks, making plans and preparations for their westward trek. Finally, on May 26, the overland journey began. That portion of the Taylor journal presented here has been limited, primarily, to their Nebraska crossing. It begins with their departure from St. Joseph on May 26, and concludes with their arrival at Fort Laramie, in present-day Wyoming, a journey requiring thirty-three days.

There are several reasons for concluding the journal at this point. In the first place this portion of the journal is more likely to appeal to the regional interests of those subscribing to this quarterly. Secondly, space priority is an important consideration, as the transcribed journal fills some seventy-four pages of legal size paper, double spaced typing.

The editor is indebted to the late John Colville Taylor, the grandson of Charles Wesley Taylor, who not only furnished the journal but submitted additional helpful information and several valuable suggestions. In a letter to the editor, dated April 5, 1967, Mr. Taylor stated the following: "The Charles in the book was my grandfather. He reported to us they found very little gold and that living costs were so high that about all they got together was enough to come back by boat. He evidently went out a second time and again came back by boat . . . he always said that the Panama Canal was put in the wrong place. It should have been in Nicaragua, and he knew this because he had walked across both places."

And so here is the record of still another California gold field migrant. Thus the historical mosaic, consisting of tens of thousands of migrant men, comes more sharply into focus and the historical picture of westward migration becomes more nearly complete.

The Journal: May 26-June 27, 1850

May 26th having all things in readiness for a final start, we struck our tents and commenced our march. The weather was pleasant with occasional showers until about noon when it cleared up. On our route we passed a trading Post and Missionary Mission of Sioux and Iowa Indians under charge of the Old School Presbyterians.¹ There is several hundred acres of land enclosed and under cultivation producing corn and wheat in abundance. The soil is excellent and in the hands of practical farmers would produce all the necessaries of life in the greatest profusion, requiring but little labor to prepare the ground for seed, the only deficiency being the great scarcity of timber, except upon water courses. This, however, may be obviated in time, by cultivating the various kinds of useful timber. With the exception of the margins of streams and hill sides, the country is a vast expanse of prairie without timber whose gently undulating hills and broad plains are covered with a carpet of living green as far as the eye can reach.

After travelling about ten miles we encamped. **May 27th.** Started this morning about six o'clock laying in a supply of water to last through the day, there being but few watering places for some distance. The weather exceedingly warm and sultry. Met a number of emigrants returning home with reports of sickness and death on ahead, some having gone out about two hundred miles and becoming discouraged and short of provisions are returning. Passed a fresh grave beside some dead horses. The country improves in appearance, becoming more level and stretching away as far as the eye can reach ever varying, ever changing, as we pass along the fresh green grass and beautiful wild flowers, making it one of the most enchanting scenes the eye ever rested upon. It has in truth been said, no language can describe the beauty of these western prairies, and no painter can sketch them, so vast, so boundless, a fit emblem of the mighty ocean, the broad and gentle undulations of the surface clothed with fresh green grass giving to it a wave like appearance to whatever point of

the compass. You turn your gaze, the earth and sky appear to meet without any intervening object except an occasional grove of trees or clump of bushes. The water is found in ravines and sloughs and very bad to drink being stagnant and dead, which no doubt is the principal cause of the sickness among the emigrants. There are some springs of excellent water to be met with occasionally on the way. After travelling some twenty odd miles, we encamped for the night.

May 28th. Resumed our march early this morning; the weather very cold with strong wind from the northwest. Quite a contrast to yesterday. We could hardly keep warm with extra clothing. Towards evening the weather moderated and became pleasant. We passed several graves today of emigrants some of whom died this year and some of last year. Saw several dead horses, and an ox today laying near the road. The general character of the country so far being high and rolling prairie with groves of timber along the ravines and streams of water, the prevailing timber being hickory, oak and walnut. Encamped for the night near a spring of good water, convenient to wood and grass.

May 29th. Continued our journey, weather pleasant and agreeable. Met some more returning emigrants with discouraging reports of distress ahead, mainly from scarcity of provisions. Saw several more graves of this and last year's emigration. Halted about noon at Nimahaw [sic] Creek to allow the oxen to graze and to take some refreshment ourselves.² We here saw the first California wreck, a wagon and some mill irons abandoned in the roads. After resting about two hours, we started again. Crossing the creek which is a beautiful clear stream of water with a gravel bed. The road beyond the creek lay through a bottom densely covered with timber and abounding in mud holes and stumps and coming in contact with some of the latter with our wagons resulted in breaking a few spokes. We encamped towards evening making some twenty miles.

May 30th. Continued our march as usual, weather

pleasant. Stopped awhile at noon to rest and make some repairs. We are approaching a more level country and less timber. In the afternoon, we met a large government train from Fort Leavenworth with provisions for Fort Hall. The train consisted of 35 wagons and some four or five hundred head of oxen besides horses and mules. Met more returning emigrants and passed several graves in the course of the day. Continued our march until nine o'clock in the evening and pitched our tents for the night, having travelled 25 miles today.

May 31st. Struck our tents this morning about six o'clock and continued our journey, the country still gently rolling and weather pleasant having had no rain for nearly a week. The grass abundant and good. The eye can take in at one sweep sufficient surface of grass to feed all the horses and cattle in the State of Ohio. Arrived at Blue River today about 12 o'clock and commenced making arrangements to cross the ferry by means of a raft of logs to the centre [sic] of which is attached a stout rope, the other made fast to a tree on shore some distance above. To each side of the raft is attached smaller ropes by which the raft is drawn back and forth. We had our wagons to unload and the provisions to put on the raft and more over after which we conveyed the wagons and baggage in the same manner. Worked on until dark getting about half the train over when we encamped making about twelve miles.³

June 1st. Finished ferrying and reloading our wagons. Took up our march after dinner and had a stampede this afternoon. The oxen belonging to our wagon took fright and ran off. About a dozen men joined in the chase but it was of no use. The oxen outstripped them all running about a quarter of a mile they stopped of their own accord without doing any damage. Went into camp about 5 o'clock making about eight miles.

June 2nd. Nothing of particular interest occurred today. Had a heavy storm of rain with thunder and lightning last night which aroused us up awhile but without doing us any harm. Had bad travelling today where the road crossed

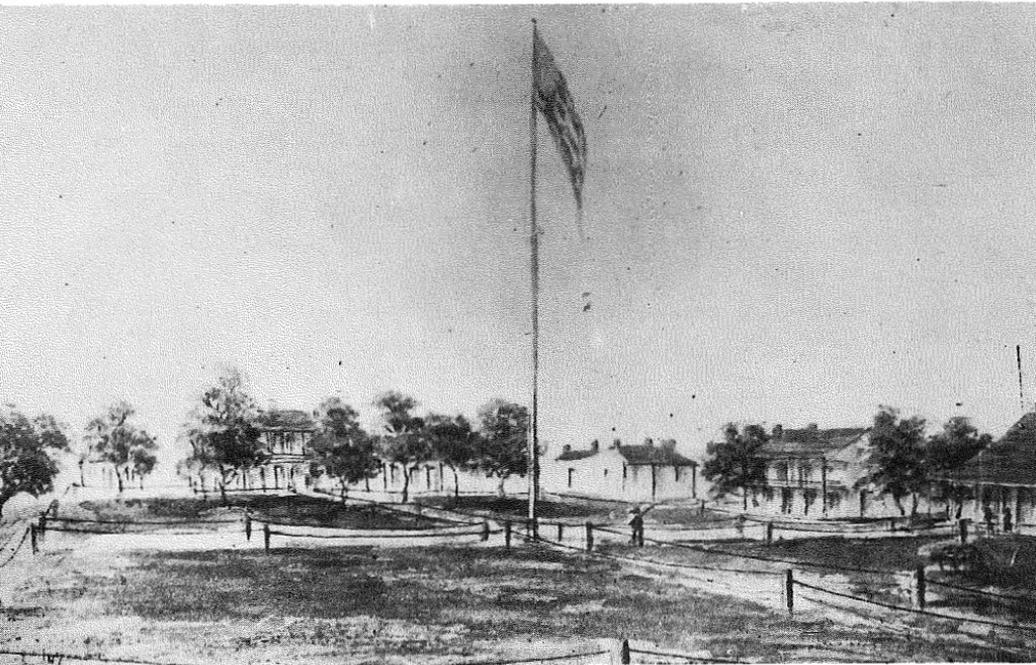
gullies and ravines, being slippery and miry, the country becoming more rolling and hilly especially in the vicinity of streams of water. Travelled on until nine or ten o'clock at night and pitched our tents.

June 3rd. Resumed our march this morning as usual. Met with the Kendalls.⁴ Today all well. Passed in the afternoon immense beds of petrified oyster shells disposed in regular strata like limestone cemented together in blocks of various sizes. The shells are very regular and perfect embracing all the different sizes as in fresh shells and in as much perfection. Met with large quantities of iron ore scattered along the road and upon the hill sides. Saw three deer today. Some of the boys gave chase wounding one slightly when they bounded off with the speed of the wind and were soon out of sight. Towards evening some buffalo were discovered. Several of the men went in pursuit of them and wounded one of them when they scampered off leaving their pursuers far behind them. During the chase, three of the men got lost and not being able to find their way to camp remained out all night exposed to the merciless peltings of a severe storm of rain with thunder and lightning, the wind blowing with such force that we were obliged to hold on to our tent by main strength to prevent it from being blown away whilst the rain fell in torrents driving through our tent and completely saturating the ground beneath it, upon which we had spread our bedding. After the storm, we lay down upon our damp bed and slept soundly till morning without experiencing any bad effect therefrom. Distance about 15 miles.

June 4th. During breakfast this morning the lost hunters returned cold and hungry, drenched to the skin, having passed a most uncomfortable night seeking shelter under a deserted tent which afforded but slight protection from the blast. Resuming our march, we found the road very slippery from last night's rain. We made but slow progress. Passed considerable groves of timber principally scrub oak, confined mostly to ravines and the margins of water. In the afternoon, it began to rain very hard. We

had a severe time to make camp. The rain falling in torrents put out our camp fires, and the ground being perfectly saturated with water. We cut some willows and laid on the ground upon which we spread on robes and blankets. After a while we succeeded in starting a fire and making some tea, after which we turned in and passed the night comfortably. Distance 10 miles.

June 5th. Remained in camp today owing to the wet weather. In the afternoon it cleared up and we put out our bedding to dry, besides performing several other operations of a domestic nature such as cooking, washing clothes, etc. in which we cannot boast of any great proficiency being resorted to in part as a matter of necessity as well as of comfort and in the performance of which, could we be seen, many a laugh might be indulged in at our expense.



Sketch of Fort Kearny, junction point for the many trails leading to California.

June 6th. Started early this morning, weather pleasant. Met some more emigrants returning on account of sickness. We passed in the course of the day 18 or 20 fresh graves of persons who have died within the last 10 or 12 days of diarrhea, by some supposed to be cholera from its fatal character which may be ascribed in part to neglect and exposure of the persons themselves, besides the want of necessary attention and remedies, to which may be added the recent wet weather and the water which is very bad and stagnant being sufficient of itself to produce sickness. Encamped in the evening on Little Blue River. Distance 20 miles.

June 7th. Continued on our journey. The road runs along the valley of Little Blue a distance of 40 miles, the general course of which is east.⁵ It is a rapid though not large stream and much swollen by the recent rains. The country is still prairie but more broken along the streams which are skirted with timber affording good camping places. Passed a large train of emigrants from Missouri who were lying by making preparations to bury a young man, one of their numbers who had just died of diarrhea. Saw some five or six more fresh graves, the great majority of deaths being among the Missourians and Illinoisians, there being a greater emigration from those two states perhaps than from all the others combined. We have plenty of company along the way. The road is lined with persons for miles hailing from all portions of the Union. Travelled on until sundown and encamped on the bank of Little Blue. Distance 20 miles.

June 8th. Made a late start this morning. We left our cattle loose overnight contrary to our usual custom to allow them to graze and a number of them swam the river which had to be crossed and the cattle driven back which detained us in consequence. Passed a company this morning from Missouri who were just burying one of their company. A married man whose wife with some female friends followed him to his last resting place uttering the most heart rending cries. Twas a scene to melt the heart to behold this poor woman bereft of her earthly friends and

protector cut down by the resistless hand of death far away from their homes and kindred among strangers and in a strange land. Death under such circumstances is truly appalling. A few miles farther on we met another company who had just performed the same office for one of their number. Saw more returning emigrants who report sickness ahead. Left the valley of little Blue River this afternoon. The road ascending a high bluff we were again upon the wide spreading prairie whose wave like undulations and rich carpet of green dotted with beautiful wild flowers of every hue with a beauty and native freshness seldom seen in the green house plants of civilized life. Whilst crossing a creek during the forenoon, our oxen becoming unmanageable from thirst as soon as they entered the water, wheeled upstream suddenly causing the wheels to catch on the edge of the bank which was steep. Seeing at a glance the danger to our wagon, I at once gave the alarm to Charles who was inside, when he came rolling and pitching in a hurry which he had no sooner done than over went our wagon with a crash and a splash in the water, throwing baggage and provisions, cooking utensils, guns, ammunitions into a promiscuous heap. Here was a beautiful compound containing about as many different ingredients as some of the quack nostrums of the day and producing as beneficial a result upon our systems, calling into play the latent energies of our nature, quickening the circulation and dispelling the gloomy forebodings of mind which had taken possession of us. No sooner had our wagon struck the water than we followed suit and pitching into the mud and water we soon succeeded in extricating the contents of our wagon and placing them safely on shore. We next righted up the wagon and drawing it on shore commenced reloading; fortunately for us the water was not very deep. The wagon falling on the side, and having a stout cover prevented such articles as would float from being carried away in the current. In this affair, we came off better than we expected losing nothing and doing no damage, merely wetting some of our clothes and bedding which was a trifling matter. Having arranged our loading, we continued on our way and towards evening we en-

camped on the prairie in the midst of a severe storm of rain. We succeeded however in making some coffee and with pilot bread we made a hearty supper and went to bed where we soon forgot the troubles and toils of the day. Travelled today 18 or 20 miles.

June 9th. Started early this morning. Nothing of interest transpired today. Met a few more returning emigrants who report sickness still ahead of us. We are now approaching the river Platte. The character of the country presenting a different appearance; the soil becoming more sandy, and the grass less luxuriant. This afternoon we came within sight of a low chain of hills which bound the valley of the Platte on the south side extending to the southwest as far as the eye can reach, forming an agreeable contrast to the level prairie, which though beautiful had become rather monotonous from its vast extent. Everything here is accomplished on a grand and magnificent scale far surpassing the puny efforts of man and greatly beyond his powers of comprehension. The vastness, the sublimity and grandeur of these beautiful gardens of nature planted here by the God of nature for the benefit of his creatures form a scene which the eye delights to rest upon. The mind becomes confused and bewildered, lost as it were, in immensity. It is in situations like this that man knows and feels his own insignificance and dependence, that in comparison man with all his boasted skill and knowledge is but a mere worm, grovelling in the dust of God's footstool. Continuing our journey, we encamped towards evening in a level and extensive plain. Here we found a great scarcity of timber although we could see for miles, not a solitary tree, bush or switch could be discovered. This is the principal drawback on this country, and were it not for this might be considered the garden of the world. Distance 18 miles.

June 10th. Resuming our journey this morning after travelling a few miles, we crossed the low sand hills seen yesterday and entered the valley of the Platte, which is three or four miles wide at this point. There are two roads, one along the bank of the river, the other along the base

of the sand hills. Both roads being on the south side of the river. Saw a large number of emigrants today, the road being lined as far as the eye could reach with wagons, horses, mules and oxen. There is no timber here except on the islands in the river where it grows large and plentiful, there being none on either bank or neighboring hills, which is owing perhaps to the annual burning of the prairie grass which consumes everything to the waters edge. On the north side of the river, there is a similar chain of sand hills to those on the south, and running parallel with an extensive bottom between 3 and 4 miles wide. Reached Fort Kearney about six o'clock in the evening and encamped one mile from the Fort as all grass within that distance is required for government use. Procured some good water from a well at the Fort which is quite a luxury in this country. There are three or four good frame houses for the accommodation of the officers and soldiers, besides extensive ranges of stables, the walls of which are built of sod about two feet thick and the roof covered in with straws making a most comfortable building, warm in winter. Some of the dwellings are built of the same material, the cheapest and most comfortable which can be built here owing to the scarcity of timber. What is made use of here for building purposes is procured from the islands. The river at this point is as wide if not wider than the Missouri, which it very much resembles in appearance, being swift and muddy, full of whirls and eddies. Although equaling the Missouri in width, it bears no comparison whatever in depth being shallow and fordable in many places, ranging from two to six and eight feet in depth. The bottom is composed of a fine quick sand which is continually shifting and changing from the action of the water cutting it into deep holes and ridges and rendering it dangerous to cross. Distance travelled today 15 miles.

June 11th. Resumed our journey as usual. On last evening an estimate was made of the amount of breadstuffs on hand and it was ascertained that we had about one hundred pounds to each man, which was not deemed sufficient, as we had, as it were, just begun our journey. The only

articles of which we supposed we had enough was bacon, coffee and tea, and of articles such as sugar, rice, dried fruits, etc. we had but a very trifling quantity. Notwithstanding we had been promised ample provisions, bedding, etc., there having been great dissatisfaction among the men owing to the non-compliance of Wright & Co. with their contract.⁶ The men were determined to ascertain the true state of affairs, the result of which was the whole company was put upon rations as no provisions were to be had at the Fort. The only chance being of purchasing of returning emigrants. In the course of the forenoon, we luckily fell in with some emigrants who were about returning and purchased of them some provisions such as flour, meal, pinola, sugar, hams, etc., which produced a better state of feelings for the time being.

We encamped before sundown on the bank of the Platte, which still maintains its singularity being wide but shallow and abounding in innumerable islands, some of which are of vast extent and densely covered with timber, undergrowth etc., contrasting strangely with the valley and adjacent hills, which are entirely destitute of timber producing a barren and desolate appearance. Yet the soil of the valley is rich and abounding in excellent grass. The hills appear to be composed entirely of sand affording a scanty growth of plants, grass, etc. Distance today 18 miles.

June 12th. Nothing of interest transpired today. Our march is still along the Valley of the Platte which is becoming rather monotonous, from the uniformity of the surface being a broad level valley from 6 to 8 miles wide with a low range of hills on either side. Saw a few more returning emigrants today in consequence of sickness and death on the way. Encamped before dark on the Plum Creek, a tributary of the Platte, a small stream with a sluggish current, the water tasted bad. Distance 18 miles.

June 13th. Left our encampment as usual, our route still up the broad valley of the Platte on the bank of which we stopped to water our cattle, where we had a fine view of the river showing the whole width and being wider at

this point than the lower Mississippi, [Missouri] but shallow, muddy and turbulent, the very counterpart of the Missouri in everything except depth. Passed 12 or 14 fresh graves today, all having died within a few days of diarrhea or cholera. Encamped about 7 o'clock in the evening. Distance today 20 miles.

June 14th. We are still wending our way up the broad valley of the Platte; as we advance the hills become more elevated and broken on both sides of the river, there being but little difference in other respects. Our road is still on the south side of the Platte, sometimes on the river bank and others on the base of the hills or bluffs. Passed some 20 more fresh graves and one grave just digging to bury a man who had died of prevailing disease, induced probably by bad water, exposure and improper habits. By far the great majority of cases are Missourians whether from the large number or peculiar habits of the people is not known. Distance today 20 miles.

June 15th. The morning was pleasant. We started early having had a good nights rest. Overtook a number of emigrants today, in fact the road is literally lined with them as far as we can see. The Platte presents the same singular features, broad swift and muddy dotted with numerous islands, some of great extent covered with trees and undergrowth, there being none on either shore except on water courses or in ravines, the prairies being annually swept by fire, thus keeping down all timber unless protected by water.⁷ The rich green sward of the prairie is decked with clusters of beautiful wild flowers of every hue, full of native beauty and freshness. Today I ascended the hills with the telescope from which I had a most beautiful and extended view. The broad valley of the Platte lay at my feet with the river winding along through its grassy bosom like a string of burnished silver with its countless green islands creating innumerable channels whose intricate and web like windings almost defy the eye in tracing them out. The width of the valley from bluff to bluff is about 8 or 10 miles whilst the valley stretches away east and west until lost to the eye in distance. With the aid

of the glass, I discovered a train of wagons and oxen on the north side of the river being the trail from Council Bluff.⁸ As we advance, the hills on our left sweep away to the south and we begin to emerge again into the open prairie, the bluffs still continuing as usual on the other side of the river. Passed 12 or 14 fresh graves today. Harrington's passenger train from St. Louis passed us this afternoon getting along well.⁹ We encamped towards sundown about one mile from the river having travelled about 20 miles today.

June 16th. Continued our journey after an early breakfast. Weather pleasant, the character of the country about the same except that the prairie is cut up by ravines and gullies which cross our road in their course to the river. Towards noon the weather became very warm and in the evening the heat was excessive. Passed some more fresh graves today. Met a number of returning emigrants, some sick of the prevailing disease having lost some of their comrades. We are now in the vicinity of buffalo, deer and antelope, but as yet have not succeeded in killing any owing to the openness of the country it being very difficult to get within gunshot. Halted at noon to refresh ourselves and allow the oxen to graze. Pushed on and encamped at the junction of the south fork of the Platte, convenient to water. The river at this point presenting the usual features and stretching away to the south up which our route lays. More fresh graves today. Made about 20 miles today.

June 17th. Resumed our journey as usual, our road inclining out from the river bottom over a succession of ridges, terminating in bluffs upon the river and again coming out upon the river. We are still upon the great ocean of prairies spreading out before us [as] far as the eye can reach without an intervening object in the distance to obstruct the view, except the crest of some gentle swell, well defined against the horizon; the beautiful green sod variegated with flowers of every hue, with the different varieties of the prickly pear and cactus, the beautiful groves of timber upon the islands, and the high range of hills

which border the north shore of the river, altogether making a most beautiful scene worthy the pencil of the painter. The soil for the last day or two being of a more sandy and clayey nature. Met quite a large number of emigrants returning home in consequence of the scarcity of feed for animals and the sickness together, the majority being families going to California & Oregon to settle. Saw some 15 or 16 fresh graves during the day. Pitched our tents about six in the evening upon the gentle slopes of a hill fronting the river. Made 12 or 14 miles today.

June 18th. Started early this morning. A strong cool breeze from the north made our overcoats feel comfortable but towards noon, it became necessary to throw them aside as the weather grew uncommonly warm. Passed more graves today; the cholera still prevails along the river. Met Mr. Kendall today, his company being just ahead of us. Deer and antelope are quite numerous, but very hard to kill owing to the absence of trees, bushes, etc. and the great distance the game can see you. Several of our men went out this morning but returned without success. The country through which we have passed the last two days appears to have suffered great drought, the grass being short and crisped; it is with difficulty the cattle can get sufficient. Encamped in the evening near the ford of the South Fork, which we here cross, having made some 20 miles today.

June 19th. Commenced preparations this morning for crossing the river here being about $\frac{3}{4}$ or 1 mile wide and from one to five feet deep, with a gravel and quicksand bottom making it rather difficult crossing as the rapid current is constantly operating on the sand, washing it out from under the feet of the cattle and wagon wheels causing them to settle down whenever they stopped. In order to insure the safety of our provisions, we placed one wagon bed upon the top of another. In it we put our provisions and such articles as would damage by water. In the lower bed we put camp kettles, cooking utensils, bacon, etc. Thus prepared, we attached to the wagon some 8 or 9 yoke of oxen and drove in. Upon each side of the wagon check lines were secured and held by men who waded alongside

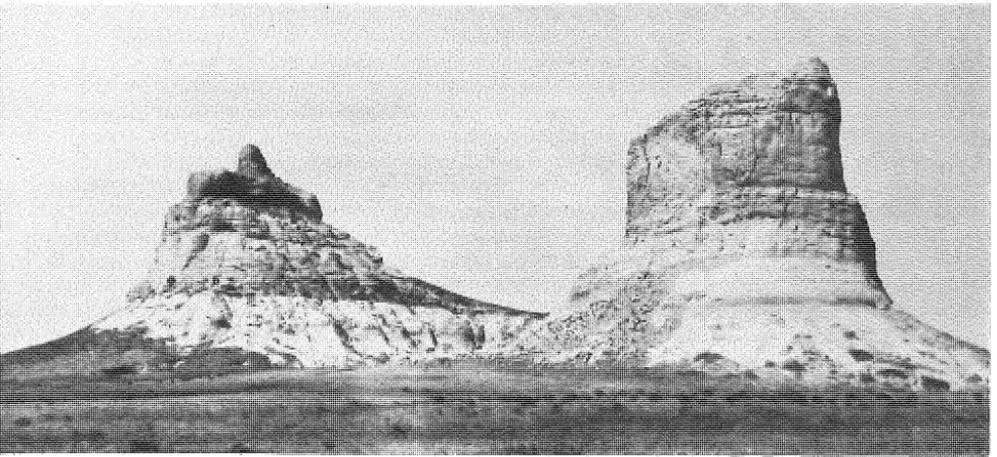
to prevent it from upsetting while others, rode and waded to guide the oxen. The whole of the day was thus occupied in crossing which was accomplished without any damage or accident to provisions or men. This ford is about two hundred miles below Fort Laramie. We found the grass much better upon this side of the river. There are one or two fords above but this is considered best.¹⁰

June 20th. Remained in camp today, part of which was occupied in reloading, the balance in resting our weary limbs.

June 21st. Having all things in readiness once more, we took up our line of march, our course being now up the north side of the South Fork. In the afternoon we came to the old ford or crossing but little used at present. Our route at this point left the river and inclined to the northwest. The bluffs or hills here are rather broken ascending which we were once more upon the prairie level with its gentle undulations and rich carpet of green the character of the soil being the same as that passed over for several days past. Timber of every description being confined to the islands. We find great difficulty in procuring enough for cooking purposes. However, we find an excellent substitute and very abundant, the dried excrement of the buffalo. It is amusing to see men collecting it by the arm load and bag full staggering into camp, after a long days march, and to see us preparing our meals with it would doubtless shock the nerves of the delicate and refined votaries of fashion. So much has habit and custom to do with our likes and dislikes. Be this as it may. We enjoyed our food so prepared with as keen a relish as would the epicure the most costly and delicate viands. Towards evening it began to lower and threaten rain. We had a hard drive to make camp which we did in the midst of a heavy shower of rain accompanied with vivid flashes of lightning and loud pealing of thunder whilst the wind came careening along threatening destruction to our tents to which we held with might and main. After the blast we succeeded in making some hot coffee and had a good

supper after which we turned in for the night and slept soundly. Distance today 20 miles.

June 22nd. After breakfast, we started again and on our way towards noon came in sight of the North Fork. Our road led from the high land down through a most romantic spot called Ash Hollow with rugged cliffs, crowned with cedars and deep ravines, skirted with wild cherry and service berry bushes, and shrubbery of various kinds. There are some excellent springs in this hollow from which we obtained a supply. The rock here appears to be pure



Courthouse Rock & Jail Rock
(Photo, Downey's Midwest Studio, Scottsbluff)

limestone, besides masses of sand and gravel united as if by petrification. Broke the coupling pole of our wagon in dropping down a gravel bank in a creek bottom. At noon we emerged upon the bank of the north fork of the Platte where we halted and repaired our wagon. The bluffs fronting the river present a bold, rugged and precipitous appearance assuming every variety of form and shape. On the opposite shore the land rises gradually from the river until it reaches the prairie level. The river here is about as wide as the Ohio but shallow, swift and muddy and dotted with numerous islands densely timbered. Continued our journey along the valley until evening when we en-

camped in the midst of another storm of rain, but succeeded in passing the night comfortably. Passed but few graves the last few days. Distance today 18 miles.

June 23rd. Started early this morning. Our course is still up the valley. The river bottom is quite sandy making heavy pulling for the oxen. We crossed several dry beds of creeks and ravines which cross the valley from the hills. We passed today an Indian corpse elevated upon a scaffold supported by poles and secured by thongs of hide. The body was enveloped in a buffalo robe and blankets. Upon the top of the poles was suspended the shot pouch of the deceased and upon the scaffold were secured his snow shoes, and upon his feet were beaded moccasins, this being the customary mode of burial among the Sioux Indians to which tribe he belonged.

Met the Kendalls in the course of the afternoon. They were lying by all well's. [sic]. The hills on our left begin to recede being low and undulating diminishing in the distance until they appear to sink or melt into the rolling prairie. The water along the road is not drinkable being highly impregnated with alkali and very injurious to cattle and horses. After travelling some 16 or 18 miles, we encamped for the night convenient to good water and grass.

June 24th. Started early. Our route in the early part of the day was rather difficult owing to the deep sand along the river bottom and the dry beds of creeks and ravines which cross it. Laid by at noon about 2 hours to refresh ourselves as is our custom in the afternoon. There came up a heavy shower of rain which did not last long but laid the dust finely. Crossed a small creek with clear water and gravelly bottom,—quite a variety here. The land on our left is broken and rolling with low sand hills. Some distance to the south of us we saw an elevated ridge of hills covered with cedar. Quite a cheering sight in this timberless country. We still resort to buffalo chips for cooking, etc. The bluffs upon the opposite shore are bold and elevated, the formation being a soft earthly limestone and marl which the wind and rain cut into many curious

shapes resembling buildings with cupaloes, fortresses, towers, etc. needing only a little exercise of the imagination to complete the picture. Towards evening, we passed an encampment of Sioux Indians consisting of some four or five families with some white traders connected with them, being the first Indians we have seen since leaving the mission, thirty five miles from the Missouri River, being a distance of five hundred miles. We were told by the traders that there were two thousand upon the other side of the Platte 8 or 10 miles distant but this we doubted considering the traders as roguish and treacherous as the Indians themselves. Made camp upon elevated ground with good grass about one mile from the River. Distance today 17 miles.

June 25th. Resumed our journey this morning. After travelling a few miles, we came in sight of the Court House, an isolated ledge of rocks rising abruptly from the prairie to the height of two or three hundred feet composed of a soft marl and earthly limestone which is constantly decomposing from the action of the wind and rain. At a distance it resembles an immense dome surmounted with a cupalo; about one hundred feet to the east of it stands another column of rock, but of smaller dimensions. At a distance of some twenty miles to the west we caught a first glimpse of the celebrated chimney Rock. A column or shaft of rock rising perpendicularly from the top of a conical hill to the height of three hundred feet. The column itself resembles at a distance the chimney of the Laboratory in Fulton (Ohio).¹¹ It is composed of the same materials as the rest of the rock in this region and is connected with an extensive range of bluffs running parallel with and upon the south side of the Platte. The scenery is every day becoming more interesting, there being more variety; we have become wearied with the vast expanse of prairie. Saw some emigrants today wending their way up the north side of the river. Continuing up the valley, we encamped in the evening 4 or 5 miles below Chimney Rock; Travelled 20 miles today.

June 26th. After an early breakfast, I started with

one of our men to visit the rock and after two hours walk, we reached its base and commenced the ascent which is quite steep for about two hundred feet which brought us to the foot of the column rising perpendicularly one hundred feet more and here our progress was arrested. The shaft is of irregular form, the sides being cut into grooves by the action of wind and rain and resembling somewhat a fluted column. The entire hill and shaft is composed of a fine grained sandstone with a solid and compact clay and fine sand. The base of the column is literally covered with names to the number of thousands, being easily carved in the soft materials of which it is composed. I inscribed my name among the rest at an elevation of two hundred feet. We had an extensive view on all sides, the broad and extensive valley beneath us, and the yellow waters of the Platte wending their swift and turbulent way towards the great father of waters. To the south of us lay an extensive range of bluffs looming up in the distance, their brows covered with cedars, the general course being east and west and may be considered the base of the black hills.¹² Continuing on up the valley about 18 miles to Scotts bluffs which comes in contact with the river. The road at this point leaves the river bottom inclining in among the hills and travelling a few miles farther on, we encamped for the night. Made about twenty five miles today.

June 27th. After a march of 8 or 10 miles, we reached the bluffs where we stopped to noon here. We found an encampment of Sioux Indians, besides a trading post kept by some young men from Missouri. We had an Indian to dine with us today. We set before him the best we had and invited him to sit down with us on the ground, our table being the tail gate of our wagon. We fell too with keen appetites and did ample justice to our rather scanty meal. Our Indian guest ate heartily and seemed to enjoy himself well. We gave him some tobacco which pleased him very much. They are a fine looking tribe and appear to be very civil, but there are a number of evil disposed white men living among them who no doubt exert an evil influence over them. Many of them have Indian wives.

Chimney Rock, a familiar landmark to those journeying west.



There has been no depredations committed upon emigrants this year upon this route as far as we have been able to learn, owing preferably to the prevalence of cholera of which they stand in great dread. We found an excellent spring of water in a deep ravine but our oxen could not avail themselves of it. Ascended the bluffs after dinner from which we caught a view of Laramie's Peak looming up in the distant horizon like a heavy bank of clouds, being the highest peak in the range and distant about fifty miles. Towards evening, we reached the river bottom again, a joyful occasion to us as it afforded us an opportunity of getting good water, the main article in this dry country. Encamped near the river. Distance 25 miles.

June 28th. Our route is now again up the Platte valley, the road alternately along the bluffs and along the bank. The valley here is more broken and sandy and cut up with deep ravines making heavy work for the cattle. Passed this afternoon another trading post and Indian encamp-

ment. Laramies peak still in view and apparently as far off as when we first saw it. The appearance of the country is more interesting. The sight of ridges covered with scattering timber was indeed a welcome sight to us and quite a contrast to the endless monotony of the prairie. Yet still there is something sublime and beautiful in these prairies, covered with a rich carpet of green, besprinkled with flowers of every hue and patches of prickly pear and cactus in full bloom, the wild sun flower in its native beauty looking like a rich mantle of gold thrown upon the green sward, the sweet scented wild rose perfuming the air with its fragrance, together with many other beautiful flowers and shrubbery make it an enchanting scene to the weary traveller, beguiling him on his perilous journey making him forget for a while the many dangers which overwhelms us. Man comparatively being as an atom cast upon the bosom of the ocean, bewildered and lost in amazement he gazes until his eyes grow weary, so boundless, as it were, that he cannot measure it, neither can he appreciate it nor yet describe it. Encamped for the night after a march of 20 miles.

June 29th. Resumed our journey. As we advance the country becomes more elevated and broken, abounding in rock, coarse gravel and sand while the river bottom in places is covered with deep fine sand, making it very difficult travelling for our jaded cattle. Laid by as usual at noon to rest. While so doing the Kendalls over took us again having lain by one day since leaving South Fork. All well.

Pushed on a few miles and encamped about the middle of the afternoon upon elevated ground fronting the river, about two miles below the junction of Laramies River with the Platte and in view of the crossing. We are nearing the Black Hills [Rocky Mountains] whose rugged brows are covered with pines and cedars, a cheering sight in this otherwise barren county, while the swift and muddy Platte winding its rapid course along like an impatient steed, impeded somewhat in its course by innumerable islands and sand bars covered with drift wood. We are at present

well situated in regard to wood and water. A great desideratum. Here we have plenty of dry cedar and pitch pine which make an excellent fire doing away with the necessity of buffalo chips. So far the company have been highly favored with regard to health not having lost a single man by sickness or accident though we have had several sick with the prevailing disease and only one who was considered dangerous, but is now up and about as usual. Judging from the diminished number of graves the last few days, we are led to believe the sickness abating, as we are daily getting into a more elevated and healthy region of country with pure atmosphere and clear running water.

July 1st. Laid by yesterday in order to rest previous to crossing the river. Started as usual this morning to the ford which we succeeded in crossing without any difficulty whatever by elevating our provisions and baggage on the top of the bed. We kept everything dry, the water coming only a few inches in the bottom of the bed. The Laramie River at this point is some thirty yards wide and four feet deep at the ford with solid, gravelly bottom, but with a current so swift that a man cannot keep his feet. Stopped a few hours in the neighborhood of Fort Laramie to repack our provisions and baggage affording all who wished an opportunity of visiting the Fort and of sending letters back to the States of which I availed myself with many other. The Fort is situated on the west bank of the Laramie about one mile above the junction with the Platte. It is a large quadrangular structure built of Adobe and neatly white washed giving it a clean and airy appearance. The walls are about fifteen feet in height enclosing a range of rooms on the four sides. Each room with its door and window opening into a large court or yard. On the inside there are two entrances into the court which is about one hundred and thirty feet square. Over the main entrance is a tower pierced with loop holes. At the two diagonal corners are large square bastions arranged so as to sweep the four walls. Near the Fort are several frame and adobe buildings which are used as stores, shops and post office,

dwelling for officers, etc. At the Fort we found books in which were registered the names and residence of emigrants who have passed up to this date as follows: Men, 36,615. Women, 734. Children, 963. Wagons, 8,773. Horses, 22,333. Oxen, 29,021. Cows, 4,509. Sheep, 45. Besides the numbers who no doubt have passed without registering, and those yet behind will probably swell the amount to fifty thousand emigrants who will have passed over the plains this year. Total number of deaths reported at the Fort up to date is 20% but this no doubt falls very far short of the actual number.

Table of distances from Fort Laramie to Fort Hall.

Upper Platte Ferry	129 ³ / ₄ miles
Independence Rock	176 "
South Pass	270 "
Junction of California and Oregon Routes ...	390 "
Green River	350 ³ / ₄ "
Bear River	492 ¹ / ₂ "
Salt Lake	509 "
Fort Hall	540 "

Encamped a few miles beyond the Fort on the bank of the Platte, making in all about 6 or 7 miles today.

July 2nd. Remained in camp today while some of our company returned to the Fort to purchase some more oxen to strengthen our teams succeeded in getting four yoke.

NOTES

¹ This was the Presbyterian mission for the Iowa, Sauk and Fox Indians. The mission was in operation from approximately 1837 to 1863. Its site lies approximately one mile east of present day Highland in Doniphan County, Kansas.

² This is the present day "Big" Nemaha, more accurately described as the South Fork of the Nemaha River.

³ The Taylor party may or may not have crossed the Big Blue at the famous ford known as the Independence, Mormon or California crossing. Frank J. Marshall established a ferry and trading post at this crossing in 1849. The fact that Taylor made no mention of the ferry or the post would seem to indicate they used another crossing. The Marshall trading post and ferry is located some three or four miles below present Marysville, Kansas.

⁴ Taylor did not clearly identify the Kendalls or other parties which were obviously acquaintances of his. Also, on this date the Taylors very likely entered present day Nebraska. The trail entered Nebraska at the extreme southwest corner of present day Gage County, Nebraska.

⁵ Taylor is referring to the direction of the Little Blue River and not to the road.

⁶ This is the first mention of any contract arrangements. Taylor did not elaborate on the size of their party, costs, etc., nor does he clearly identify who or what constituted "Wright & Co."

⁷ It is interesting to note the several references to the annual prairie fires which are blamed for the absence of timber on the prairie.

⁸ By traveling along the south side of the Platte River the Taylor party was following what was called the "St. Joe" road.

⁹ As usual Taylor did not adequately identify who or what the Harrington "passenger train" was.

¹⁰ There were several crossings near this point, all being in the general vicinity of present day Ogallala, Nebraska.

¹¹ Court House and Chimney Rock were notable landmarks on the overland trail. Court House Rock is about five miles south of present day Bridgeport and Chimney Rock is about four miles south of the town of Bayard, both locations being in Morrill County, Nebraska.

¹² There are occasional early day references to the bluffs, near present day Scottsbluff, as being the "lower Black Hills."