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Article Summary: Winfield Scott Ebey kept a diary as his family traveled from Missouri to Whidbey Island, Washington Territory. As they approached the end of that challenging trip, the writer predicted that he would remember the overland trail days with special pleasure.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Winfield Scott Ebey, Jacob Ebey, Sarah Ebey, Isaac Ebey, Mary Ebey Wright, Ruth Ebey, Jack Lesley

Place Names: Plum Grove Place, Missouri; Whidbey Island, Washington; Council Bluffs, Iowa; Florence, Chimney Rock and Scott's Bluffs, Nebraska; Fort Laramie, South Pass and Sublette's Cutoff, Wyoming; Fort Hall and Fort Boise, Idaho

Keywords: William Clayton, *The Latter Day Saints Emigrant's Guide*; Hosea B Horn, *Overland Guide*; Mormon Trace; Mormon Trail; *General Marion*; cholera; Oregon Trail; Washington Territorial Emigrant Road; Ward Massacre

Photographs / Images: Council Bluffs of Kaneshville Ferry on the Missouri River (Frederick Piercy sketch, c. 1853); map showing the route Ebey followed to Washington Territory; Fort Laramie (Piercy sketch, c. 1853)

OVERLAND FROM MISSOURI TO WASHINGTON TERRITORY IN 1854

By GERALD BAYDO

COUNTLESS PERSONS who attracted little or no attention and whose names do not appear in the history of the frontier settled Western America. Winfield Scott Ebey was one of them. He, however, kept a daily diary from 1854 to 1863 that permits the reader to follow him from Missouri to Whidbey Island, Washington Territory.¹ During his thirty-three years of life, he was farmer, lawyer, soldier, gold seeker, trader, deputy collector of customs, deputy marshal, spiritualist, minor politician, and bachelor. In 1854 he was one of the countless emigrants to the west coast.

On April 26, 1854, the Jacob Ebey family of Plum Grove Place, Missouri, was making final preparations to move to Whidbey Island in Washington Territory. Sixty-one year old Jacob Ebey had lived on his farm in north-central Missouri for more than twenty years; he was now ready again to seek his fortune in the West. Born in Huntington County, Pennsylvania, in 1793, he, like many farmers of the early 19th century, had sought fertile land in the West. He had lived in Ohio for five years, then moved to Sangamon County, Illinois, where in 1832 he served with Abraham Lincoln in the Black Hawk War.² In the early 1830's he moved to Missouri where he was a pioneer farmer in Adair County.³

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In 1848 Jacob's eldest son Isaac had started for Oregon, but on hearing the news of gold strikes, he went to California instead. Isaac was moderately successful at mining; in 1849, however, he moved from San Francisco to Olympia, Oregon Territory. During the spring and summer of 1850 he explored the Puget Sound country and looked for a farm. In 1852 he took a claim on Whidbey Island under the Oregon Donation Law.⁴ That winter Isaac was elected to the Oregon Territorial Legislature and became a leader in the movement for separate territorial status for Northern Oregon Territory. When Washington Territory was formed in 1853, he unsuccessfully campaigned for governor; he, however, accepted the post of Collector of Customs for the District of Puget Sound. While he was living in Washington Territory, Isaac often wrote to his family at Plum Grove Place, Missouri. These letters reported favorably on the Puget Sound country and were particularly enthusiastic about Whidbey Island.⁵

In 1852 Jacob had begun to make the necessary preparations to follow his son to Washington Territory. First he tried to sell his farm to acquire money with which to buy equipment and stock, but he had difficulty in selling the farm for a "fair price."⁶ During the winter of 1853-1854, he sold the farm and bought oxen to pull the wagons, cattle to stock the new homestead, and supplies. He "exchanged" most of his furniture for two wagons and some horses and decided upon April 27 as the day of departure.

Jacob and his wife Sarah, a Virginian, headed the group of fourteen that was to travel overland to Washington Territory. A bachelor and farmer, Winfield Scott Ebey, whose only home had been the farm in Missouri, expressed a genuine desire to travel to Washington Territory: "It has been my ardent wish to join my brother in that country."⁷ Jacob's two daughters were also moving. Born in 1817 in Ohio, Mary Ebey married George Wright in Missouri and had two children, Almira and Polk. The recent death of her husband permitted her to join the overland party.⁸ Ruth Ebey, born a deaf-mute in Illinois in 1829, was the final member of the Ebey family to make the trip.⁹

Seven other persons were to travel with the Ebey family. Jack Lesley, a friend of Jacob Ebey from nearby Putnam County, had twice crossed the plains and had decided that in the spring of 1854 he would take his wife and three children to California.¹⁰ Two bachelors, George Beam and James J. Wood, completed the party. Twenty-year-old George Beam had been living with his cousins, the Ebeys; James J. Wood a visitor from the East also decided to travel with them.

During the months before departure, the Ebeys had become familiar with two guide books, William Clayton's *The Latter Day Saints Emigrant's Guide* and Hosea B. Horn's *Overland Guide*.¹¹ In addition to general advice for travel, the guide books gave detailed day-to-day information as to camping places, water, grass, fuel, and the conditions of the road. Written in 1847, Clayton's guide described the Mormon Trail along the north side of the Platte from Council Bluffs to Salt Lake. Since the condition of the trail had changed between 1847 and 1854, the Ebeys also used Hosea Horn's commercial guide published in 1852. This recent guide that detailed the route from Council Bluffs to Sacramento, California, was only partially useful for the traveler headed to Washington Territory.¹²

On April 26, 1854, the day before departure, the Ebeys loaded a few pieces of furniture and supplies including food, clothing, and tents into two wagons. After Lesley brought his wagon and stock on the Ebey farm, Winfield Ebey recorded, "fourteen persons, three wagons, ten yoke of oxen, eight cows, fifteen head of cattle, five horses, and one mule" and declared that this combination of equipment and animals might be termed "a good team."¹³ Although the Ebeys had been preparing for their departure for many months, the last evening they spent at their farm was a busy one. In addition to social callers, people came to collect debts and pay bills. Before retiring that night, Winfield Ebey noted his thoughts on the coming trip:

It seems to me that everything looks more lovely than usual, but it may be that because it is the last time I shall see what I now see. . . . It will be sad to leave this place tomorrow . . . the grave of my kindred who sleep beneath the green grass.¹⁴

On the morning of April 27, a rain storm delayed their departure until 10 o'clock. This day they traveled from the Ebey farm at Plum Grove Place, west of Connelville, past Shuteye and Blackbird Creeks, and spent the night at the home of an M. Shaver.¹⁵ On a succeeding night the Ebeys found an ideal camping spot farther down the Blackbird, where the two requirements for a good immigrant camp were present — ample grass and water.¹⁶

From Lineville, just across the Missouri border in south-central Iowa, the Ebey party traveled the Mormon Trace, established by the Saints on their exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, across the state of Iowa. On May 3, the Ebeys arrived at Mount Pisgah, Iowa, northeast of present Talmage. Settled in 1846 by the Mormons who needed a supply station along the Mormon Trace, Mount Pisgah became a rest camp like nearby Garden

Grove for Mormons traveling to Council Bluffs.¹⁷ After the area of the Great Salt Lake had been established as the New Jerusalem in 1851, the Mormons abandoned Mount Pisgah.¹⁸ Well aware of the friction that had existed between the Mormons and the Missourians in the 1830's, Winfield Ebey described the Mormons as wasteful people who made this place uninhabitable for others by devastating many of their fields and crops. In 1854 he wrote that "a miserable little cabin and one post oak tree" stood where supply stations for the Mormon companies had been.¹⁹

After traveling for nearly two weeks along the Mormon Trace past few settlers and small farms,²⁰ the emigrants arrived on May 10 at Council Bluffs on the Missouri River.²¹ By 1854 Council Bluffs rivaled Independence, Missouri, as the starting point of overland travel to Oregon and California. Independence marked the beginning of the Oregon Trail; Council Bluffs, the Mormon Trail that the Mormon pioneers had followed in 1847-1848 on their passage from Winter Quarters, across the Missouri from Council Bluffs to Salt Lake. With the increasing popularity of the Mormon Trail, Council Bluffs was transformed from a small Mormon community to a bustling commercial town, the last place in the States for supplies.

The Ebeys camped a few miles east of the city in a hollow crowded with people, wagons, and stock; here they made final preparations to cross the uninhabited country that lay ahead. At one of the many blacksmith shops Lesley had his wagon wheels reset. Winfield Ebey wandered into Council Bluffs and found it a place "full of people getting things for the trip where emigrants can get anything in way of 'outfit' from a lb. of tea to a wagon and team."²² Although the Ebeys bought only "small articles at first forgotten," other people came here to purchase their entire outfit for overland travel.²³ Many disappointed travelers sold all their equipment in frequent street auctions.²⁴

After two days of final preparations at Council Bluffs, the Ebey party was ready to ferry the Missouri; a fierce rain and wind storm on May 12 and crowds at the ferry landing on May 13, however, postponed their departure. On May 14 the ferry *General Marion*, crowded with settlers and Indians, carried them from Council Bluffs to the Mormon Winter Quarters, now Florence, Nebraska. In 1854 there were two ferries operating near Council Bluffs. In addition to the *General Marion*, a larger ferry was located below Council Bluffs "some 12 miles at St. Mary's."²⁵ It had started operations because of the demand created by the increased use of the Mormon Trail.²⁶

Once over the Missouri River, the Ebeys crossed a narrow divide, ferried the Elkhorn River and soon were in the Platte Valley. During the second and third weeks of May, the party diverted to the short section of the Trail paralleling the Loup River, then forded it and bore south, again reentering the Platte Valley. Following the Mormon Trail on the north side of the river, the party passed the familiar landmarks on the far side of the Platte—Fort Kearney, Ash Hollow, Chimney Rock, Scott's Bluffs and by June 18 were camped across from Fort Laramie.

In the Black Hills the Ebeys moved through rugged and volcanic country.²⁷ After traveling along the Platte for more than five weeks, on June 27 they left it and followed the Sweetwater River. The party proceeded from the ninth ford of the Sweetwater to Independence Rock where they celebrated the Fourth of July. On July 10 the Ebeys spent their last evening on the eastern side of the Rockies; half of their overland trip had been completed.

In unorganized territory on the night of May 15, the Ebey party and some families from Wisconsin congregated around the campfire to draft a plan of organization. Since the days of fur trapping companies, men in unorganized territory had made their own laws.²⁸ On the Santa Fe Trail in the 1820's there were organized companies that usually included military officers and civilian officials.²⁹ With the Oregon emigration of 1841, the Kansas River crossing became the place for the making of permanent rules and the tightening up, forming, or re-forming of companies.³⁰ Increased travel to Oregon and California stimulated greater interest in overland companies. Many emigrants drafted a constitution and elected a president and other civil officials in their home towns. The final formation of the company did not take place until after the party had left the States and the captain and other officers had been elected.³¹

Between Plum Grove Place and Council Bluffs, the Ebeys did not adopt any formal organization. Once in unorganized territory, however, they followed established tradition by drawing up a temporary company. Lesley, who had twice crossed the plains, was elected captain; it became his responsibility to select the camp sites, direct the order of travel, organize the guard systems, maintain order and discipline, and preside over company meetings. They also elected an officer of the guard whose duty it was to supervise the posting of four guards each night.³²

As had happened in earlier companies, the organization of the company and the individualism of its members came into direct conflict.

Along the Loup they met some emigrants returning to the Missouri River ferry. They reported that the Loup ford was worthless and dangerous. The company became torn over whether to continue or go back to the ferry. When the decision was put to a vote, all voted to go back except the Ebey party. Ebey noted the reason for their decision: "It is our duty to let the majority rule and go back, but we are too stubborn for that, and so the train split."³³ With their three wagons, the Ebeys moved up the Loup, while the rest returned to the ferry. Although they traveled with other wagons from Prairie Creek to South Pass, the Ebeys did not attempt to organize another company until beyond South Pass.

Each night the Ebeys followed the custom of the trail by positioning their wagons in a half-circle for protection against the Indians. They drove the cattle into the area of this half-circle and posted guards. Since horses required a much longer feeding time than cattle, they were tied up on the grass near the tents. Two guards patrolled until midnight, when they were relieved by two others who stood guard until dawn. Once this pattern had been established, settlers adhered to it carefully night after night.³⁴

Emigrants on the Mormon Trail crossed numerous tributaries of the Platte. At the Papillion Creeks, located between the Missouri and Elkhorn Rivers, the Ebeys had as much difficulty in ascending and descending the muddy banks as had the Mormons in 1848.³⁵ In 1859 a bridge that was part of the Great Military Road which passed up the north side of the Platte was constructed over these creeks.³⁶ Between 1848 and 1854 all emigrants crossed the Elkhorn River on a flatboat or a raft; the Ebeys used a flatboat drawn by means of ropes.³⁷ Although some streams such as Shell Creek and Buffalo Creek had bridges across them, emigrants occasionally helped build a bridge; at Wood River on May 28 the Ebeys repaired a bridge that had recently fallen down.³⁸

On June 22 the Ebeys arrived at Rishaw's bridge across the Platte near Deer Creek. Rishaw, its owner who had traveled to Fort Laramie in 1848 with Isaac Ebey, knew that travelers on the Mormon and Oregon Trails had to recross the Platte near Deer Creek; he, therefore, purchased the Mormon ferry, located twenty miles above Deer Creek, and constructed the only bridge in this area. His monopolistic tendency extended to all the trading posts along the Sweetwater, until, as Ebey noted, "he had grown rich on the plains."³⁹ The Ebeys and all those traveling the Mormon Trail in 1854 were not forced to use this bridge, because "a road has been made all the way up the north side so that the emigrants are now saved the trouble of crossing the Platte."⁴⁰



Frederick Piercy sketched the Council Bluffs of Kanesville Ferry on the Missouri River ca. 1853.

Between Council Bluffs and South Pass the Ebeys forded only one stream, the Loup River. Ebey's diary notation for May 21 described the procedure that emigrants followed in fording. When they had found the best place to cross, the narrowest and shallowest part of the stream, they attached to the wagons the oxen that were trained to lead; in this instance "the leaders refused."⁴¹ The Ebeys backed these oxen out and were more successful with another yoke. Cattle swam or waded across the stream, while most of the people rode in the wagons. An accident in fording was a common occurrence, because emigrants and their stock faced the danger of drowning in the swift stream or becoming embedded in the river bed. After fording streams, emigrants usually made camp to clean up their equipment; on May 24 and 25 the Ebeys camped on the south side of the Loup River "to do some washing."⁴²

Wind and rain storms were as troublesome to the Ebeys as they had been to the members of earlier emigrating companies. Near Council Bluffs on May 12 a rain storm forced them to remain in the wagons; after the storm had subsided, "nary a tent could be seen on the prairie, nearly everyone was flat on the ground."⁴³ On May 16 at the Elkhorn River the wind was so strong that Ebey was not able to fill a bucket with water.⁴⁴ The Ebeys also encountered frequent rain and hail storms along the Platte; Ebey's diary notation for May 26 referred to these storms: "I knew nothing of rain, hail storms until I saw them on the Platte."⁴⁵

On the overland trail the cholera years had been 1849, 1850, and 1852; by 1854 the epidemic was supposed to be on the wane. Between Council Bluffs and South Pass, James J. Wood and three other emigrants who were traveling with the Ebeys died of cholera. The Ebeys followed the custom of the plains and buried the dead without coffins.⁴⁶ On the day of Wood's burial Ebey wrote:

Men by thousands in pursuit of mamon have come here and laid their weary bones to rest in the valley. Everyday the hopes of wealth, the jobs and sorrows of life . . . [are swept] away [far] from those who could soothe their last moments. . . This was the last tribute of respect for a friend far from the home of his kindred and his resting place will soon be forgotten save by his friends.⁴⁷

Emigrants taxed their rudimentary medical knowledge in explaining this devastating disease. In 1849 no case of cholera was reported beyond the Platte ferry near Casper, Wyoming; emigrants, therefore, began to believe that the cholera would not occur beyond that point.⁴⁸ In his diary for June 20, Ebey noted his ideas on the cause of cholera: "The

Platte River with its wide bottoms and shallowness engendered much sickness and when we are 'away, away to the mountains' I think we will feel new life."⁴⁹

The diaries of overland travel are filled with descriptions of the scenery along the trail. Since travelers on the Mormon and Oregon Trails followed the course of the Platte for many miles, it comprised a substantial part of their diary notations. Most diarists dwelt upon its shallowness, muddiness, and wide sandy banks. On May 18 Winfield Ebey stood on the banks of the Platte River and wrote:

I looked upon it—wide, shallow, and sandy bed, with wonder. The water is always muddy and turbid rolling and bidding along as if at a high stage of water and looks to be very deep which in reality it is not in most places more than one foot and often not more than a few inches in depth.⁵⁰

On June 11 the Ebeys camped across from Castle Bluffs, located on the south side of the Platte about seven miles west of Ash Hollow. Castle Bluffs received little attention in the diaries of the trail, because it was not as impressive in size as Court House or Chimney Rock that were only a few miles farther west, and no sense of adventure and daring was connected with its name as with Scott's Bluffs. To Ebey, however, this rock formation had as much physical beauty as the nearby ones. He pictured it as an old fortification or castle, surrounded with "moats" and arranged with "towers, parapits, bastions, etc."⁵¹

On June 14 the Ebeys passed by "The Old Land Mark on the Plains"—Chimney Rock. This rock caught the eye and commanded the attention of the traveler for a stretch of over forty miles along the trail.⁵² Many of the emigrants were so intrigued with it that they climbed its sides to inscribe their names. The diarists' descriptions of it ranged from "a house with a tall chimney on the south side"⁵³ to an "immense circular chimney set up on a hill."⁵⁴ Ebey recalled his early life on the farm by picturing it as "a large hay stack with a long pole sticking in the top of it."⁵⁵

On June 15 the Ebeys passed by Scott's Bluffs, the last rock formation before Fort Laramie. The story behind its name rather than its appearance was of interest to the diarists. In the *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, Washington Irving related the tale of a trapper named Scott, who, after having been deserted by his friends, crawled sixty miles to a rock formation later named after him.⁵⁶ Diarists retold this story in many different ways. Some pictured Scott as the victim of mutiny.⁵⁷ Others explained that he was put ashore from a

boat and crawled to the rock to die.⁵⁸ Ebey added wild Indians to the story and emphasized the courage of Scott who ordered his companions to leave him behind.⁵⁹

Along the Platte in 1854 emigrants met two major Indian groups: the Sioux, often friendly to the travelers, and the Pawnee, noted for thievery and stealth.⁶⁰ Ebey appeared to have derived his idea of Indians, particularly of the Pawnee, from having read Washington Irving's *Crayon Miscellany*, in which he characterized the Pawnee as "warlike savages" and "sons of Ishmale" who often went on predatory expeditions.⁶¹ Ebey's staying out of the "sweep of all red men" at Council Bluffs and his description of the Indians on the *General Marion* as "lazy" indicated that he agreed with most emigrants and guide books that all Indians were untrustworthy savages.⁶²

Between Plum Grove Place and South Pass the Ebeys encountered little trouble from Indians, because an Indian war was going on with each tribe being "a check on the latter."⁶³ On May 22 on the Loup, Indians (probably Pawnee) stole three horses and killed an ox. The next morning Ebey and Lesley followed the horse tracks of the thieves, but were unable to retrieve the stolen horses. Since Lesley's two horses were worth \$200 and the Ebey horse and ox \$100, the emigrants' losses were substantial.⁶⁴ This incident occurred after the Ebey party had split with the other wagons near the Loup ferry; from Prairie Creek to South Pass the Ebeys traveled with the Hadleys, Wheatsills, and Burrs of Wisconsin; the Bozarth's of Adair County, Missouri; the Kings of Trumbull County, Ohio; and the Nunnallays of Thompson County, Missouri. They did not have any further trouble with Indians.

In 1854 there were trading posts located at Wood River, Ash Hollow, Fort Laramie, and along the Sweetwater River. Across the Platte from Ash Hollow on June 11, Ebey noted:

We passed a trading house where whiskey, brandy and other necessities are kept on sale for the sole use and behoof of the Emigrant for which gracious accomodation he is expected to "fork over" the most exorbitant prices.⁶⁵

Many diarists praised the work of traders; Ebey, however, distrusted men such as Rishaw, the owner of the Platte bridge, and accused them of being "closely connected with the Indians."⁶⁶ Although he was critical of traders, he did concede that "it is hard hard to tell if they are guilty or not."⁶⁷

Ebey's diary notations for April 27 to July 17 occasionally referred to the extent of the emigration of 1854 and gave some indication of the

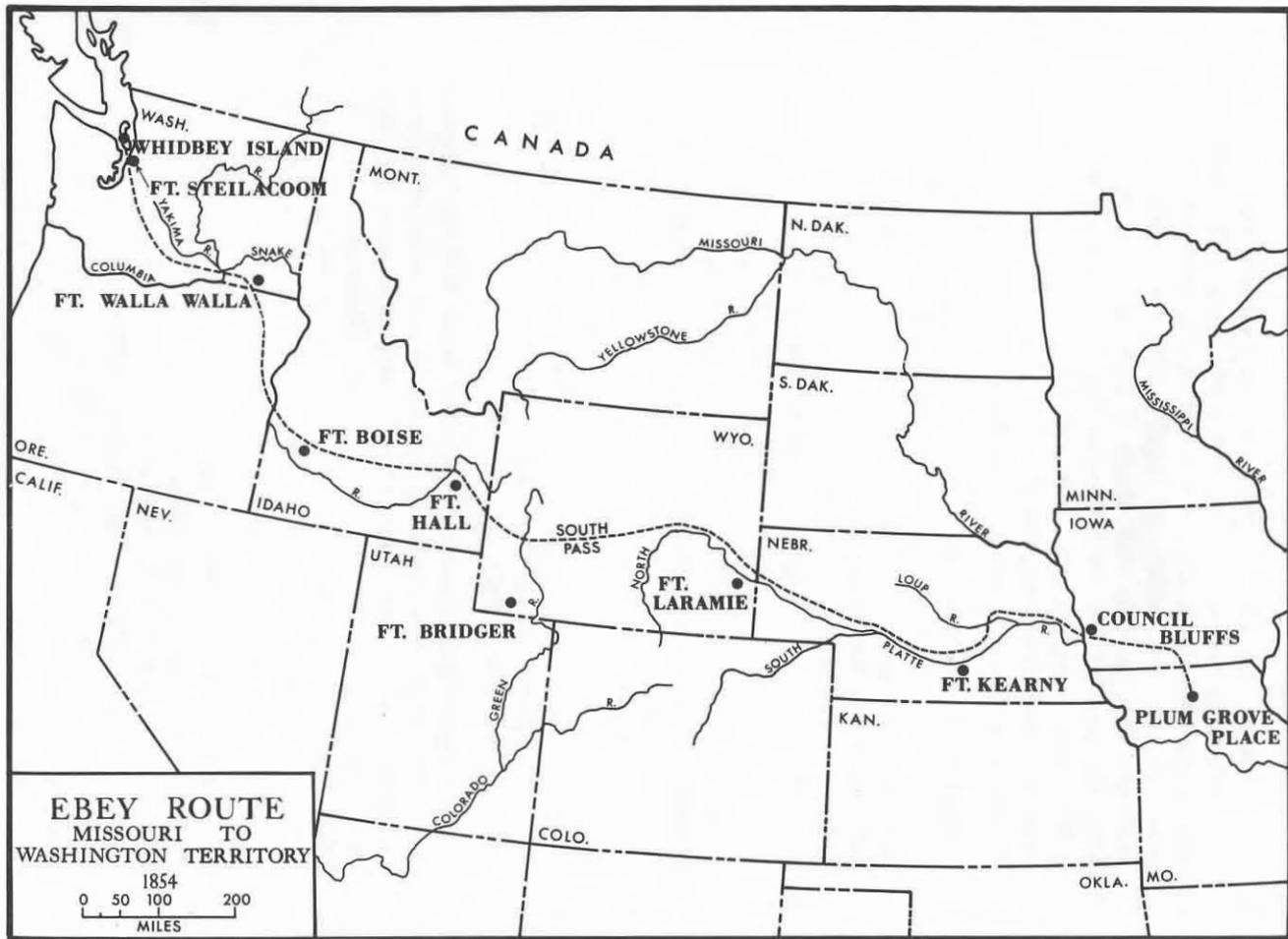
15,000 people that traveled to Oregon and California that year. At Prairie Creek he noticed "a large train from Chicago with twenty-two wagons and several head of cattle."⁶⁸ On June 1, after many hours of search in vain for buffalo, he decided "the large emigration has frightened them from the road; plenty of them are found fifteen miles from the road."⁶⁹ In 1852 Clarence Bagley similarly noted, "The buffalo were frightened away from this main traveled route."⁷⁰ In camp on June first and second, Ebey wrote, "Trains in endless succession have been . . . passing all day while we lay still."⁷¹

On July 10, less than a day from South Pass, the Ebeys spent their last night on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains. They had traveled 1,045 miles in less than two and one-half months and were now half way to Whidbey Island, Washington Territory. Recalling his home in Missouri, Ebey concluded his diary notations for this part of the trip with these words: "I shall soon place this great barrier [Rocky Mountains] between me and the home of my youth."⁷²

On July 13, 1854, the Jacob Ebey family crossed South Pass. When emigrants reached South Pass, they believed the most difficult part of their westward trip had been completed. This presumption was often incorrect, because they were usually low on supplies and the nearest supply station was Fort Hall, Idaho. Until travelers reached their destination in Oregon or Washington Territories, the dry and mountainous country between South Pass and Fort Boise and the threat of Indian attack offered many dangers.

Many diarists had an erroneous notion of South Pass; they supposed it to be a narrow defile, walled in by perpendicular rocks hundreds of feet high. Winfield Ebey, like Robert Stuart, who many historians believe first used the pass in 1812, was disappointed with the appearance of the pass and described it as "a barren plain covered with sage."⁷³ In his diary for July 13, Ebey praised the view of the Wind River and Rocky Mountains that the pass afforded him.

From South Pass the Ebeys traveled past the two Sandy Creeks to the main Salt Lake junction where two roads led to Bear River: one, labeled the Oregon Trail, by way of Fort Bridger; the other via three cutoffs, Sublette's, Kinney's, and Brown's. Sublette's Cutoff led from Sandy Creek to Green River, then southward to Ham's fork of the Green River; Kinney's was located between Sublette's and the Oregon Trail and, according to Ebey, "had good grass and water at short distances"; Brown's, the newest and southernmost, was considered "the



EBEY ROUTE
 MISSOURI TO
 WASHINGTON TERRITORY
 1854
 0 50 100 200
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best of all."⁷⁴ The Ebeyes traveled Sublette's cutoff, because their cousins the Davises operated a ferry at Sublette crossing of Green River.

A few miles west of Green River, the Ebeyes came to a fork in the road. Here Hammersley's and Dempsey's cutoffs went directly over the steep hills between Green and Bear Rivers, while Sublette's bore to the left along the bottom of the hills. Traveling Dempsey's, the shortest cutoff, the Ebeyes encountered so much difficulty in ascending the steep hills that on one occasion seven yoke of oxen were attached to a wagon.⁷⁵ Once over these hills, they passed Ham's fork of the Green River and descended the Bear Valley to Smith's fork of the Bear River.

On July 27 the Ebey party arrived at the main junction of the Oregon Trail where one road led to Oregon, the other to California by way of Hedgeperth's cutoff. Continuing along what Ebey termed the "old Oregon road," they crossed the Portneuf River and were faced with an important decision, whether to travel the Oregon Trail from Fort Hall along the Snake River to Fort Boise, or Jeffrey's new cutoff that crossed the Snake River at the mouth of the Blackfoot Fork and later rejoined the Oregon Trail. Deciding in favor of the newer road, they traveled to the Snake River ferry.

At the Snake River ferry the Ebeyes met Jeffrey, the originator of the cutoff, who had just traveled on it and was near death from lack of water. After Jeffrey gave them a guide, they traveled across thirty miles of desert to Fort Hall Butte where there was only a small spring of water. The next day they reached Goddis River, forty rather than the twenty-eight miles that Jeffrey had indicated from their camp on the Snake River. During the second week of August the train moved slowly over volcanic country past Mountain Cove Creek, Trout Creek, Spring Valley Creek, River Malade, and Willow Creek. Leaving the cutoff on August 19, they intersected the Oregon Trail and on bleached animal bones wrote their condemnation of the lack of water and mountainous terrain on the cutoff.

On August 25 the Ebeyes arrived at Fort Boise. Once in Oregon Territory they crossed the Malheur and Powder Rivers and descended into the Grand Ronde Valley. Past the Blue Mountain the party reached Umatilla Springs where the road divided; one branch, the Oregon Trail, led to the Dalles of the Columbia, the other to Puget Sound by way of Fort Walla Walla. In the Walla Walla valley the road branched again with one trail leading to the Walla Walla River, the other to Fort Walla Walla. On September 11 the Ebey family arrived at Fort Walla Walla in Washington Territory.

From Fort Walla Walla the Ebeys traveled the Washington Territorial Emigrants' Road that had been opened in 1853; during the second week of September they followed the Yakima River over flat and dry country. On September 26 the train passed Naches Pass, which Ebey described as "a chain of small prairies extending some 6 to 8 miles across the top of the mts."⁷⁶ After crossing White and Green Rivers, on October 5 they arrived at Fort Steilacoom that had been established in 1849 to protect the settlers against Indian forays.⁷⁷ Winfield Ebey took the ferry *Major Tompkins* that had come north from California to serve the growing villages and towns along Puget Sound with passenger and mail service to Olympia. There they called on a Mr. Wiley, editor of the Olympia weekly paper, *The Pioneer and Democrat*, and gave him an account of the trip.⁷⁸ When Ebey returned to Fort Steilacoom the rest of the family boarded the ferry and traveled to Whidbey Island where on October 12 they were united with Isaac and his two children.

Near South Pass the Ebeys had again organized a temporary company. Since their separation from the other wagons near the Loup ferry, Winfield Ebey had assumed the duties of captain by riding ahead to scout for camping places. At the election he was chosen captain; George King of Trumbull County, Ohio, was elected officer of the guard. In his diary Ebey commented on the decision:

I feel myself highly honored by the selection; my duty will be principally to ride on in the afternoon and select camping places, to say when and where the train shall stop and where move.⁷⁹

Like all overland companies, the Ebey company adopted a daily routine. In the morning the cattle pastured while the emigrants ate breakfast. After they had yoked the teams, milked the cows, and returned the supplies to the wagons, the day's travel commenced. The wagons led the way, with the livestock under the care of Jacob Ebey coming last. After they had stopped an hour for lunch, they rehitched the teams and again proceeded. In the afternoon Winfield Ebey rode on ahead to select the best possible camp. One hour before sundown the train halted for the night; the women then prepared supper. After dinner the "older folks" formed one group that was concerned with what Ebey called "more serious matters"; the "younger people" talked in a different circle, or else there was "individual courting by the gentlemen."⁸⁰ In his diary for July 21, Ebey wrote: "Thus our time passes pleasantly and we are happy."⁸¹

Since the earliest migration to Oregon and California, the Sublette crossing at Green River had undergone considerable alteration. Although

there were no ferries here in 1843, plenty of timber with which to construct rafts was available.⁸² In 1849 mountain men and in 1852 Mormons were operating ferries.⁸³ When the Ebeys arrived at this crossing, there were not only forty-four ferry boats operated by various enterprising individuals, but also a village of "American traders, Frenchmen, Mormons, loafers, dandies, gamblers, and idlers," which was here only during the months of overland travel.⁸⁴

The boiling sulphur springs at Beer Springs and Soda Springs in northeastern Idaho had always aroused the emigrants' curiosity. By 1854, however, these springs were drying up and "gradually diminishing in interest."⁸⁵ Most diarists made little or no distinction between the springs. In their guide book of 1843 Overton Johnson and William Winter wrote that springs were located on the east side of Bear River.⁸⁶ Traveling to California in 1849, James Pritchard noted that Beer Springs were the same as Soda Springs.⁸⁷ Ebey, however, recorded that Beer Springs were one mile east of Soda Springs and the Devil's Punchbowl was just past Soda Springs.

From the Burnt River in Oregon Territory emigrants either climbed rugged hills or boated down the turbulent Snake River to Powder River.⁸⁸ In choosing to ascend the steep hills, the Ebeys found that earlier travel had brought about many changes. There was little grass where there had formerly been an abundance; the loose stone and gravel, a result of heavy migration, made ascending the hills quite difficult. Crossing the three forks of Powder River, they arrived in the Grande Ronde Valley. Here in 1843 there were no settlers or Indians, only an abundance of grass.⁸⁹ By 1852 a Cayuse Indian village where Indians were raising and selling vegetables, such as peas and potatoes, was located in the valley.⁹⁰ D. B. Ward wrote in 1853 that the valley was in the undisputed possession of the Indians.⁹¹ The Ebeys not only encountered an Indian settlement, but also a large number of trading posts where "a person can buy or sell almost anything."⁹² Like Lansford Hastings author of the influential *The Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California*, Ebey wrote that this valley would someday be one of the richest and most valuable valleys in the country.⁹³

Between South Pass and Washington Territory the Ebeys passed by three Hudson's Bay Company forts. In 1834 Nathaniel J. Wyeth established Fort Hall on the Snake River; in 1837 he sold it to the Hudson's Bay Company. Since Fort Hall was one of the few supply stations between South Pass and Oregon and was located on a large

meadow, it became a favorite resting place of emigrants. Although it was in dilapidated condition by 1853, emigrants still considered it an "oasis in the desert."⁹⁴ The flooding Snake River inundated Fort Hall in late 1853; in 1856 the Hudson's Bay Company abandoned it. On the evening of July 31, 1854, Ebey rode to behold "venerable Fort Hall" which he found to be nothing more than a few deserted buildings: "An air of desolation reigns around."⁹⁵ Unimpressed with the appearance of the fort, he noted that it was situated on "a large and fertile bottom land which affords fine grazing."⁹⁶ Before leaving the fort he prophetically wrote, "A few years will see this place deserted."⁹⁷

At the junction of the Snake and Boise Rivers, the Ebeys discovered Fort Boise to be "a shabby concern with nothing but an antiquated adobe house with but two tolerable rooms."⁹⁸ On September 11 they were on the east bank of the Columbia River at Fort Walla Walla. This fort had also changed radically from the year 1813 in which Daniel McKenzie and Alexander Ross of the Northwest Company had erected this fort and named it Fort Nez Perce.⁹⁹

The Ebeys were only the second group of emigrants to travel the Washington Territorial Emigrant Road. In 1853 Congress had approved an appropriation of \$20,000 for the survey and construction of a military road from Fort Steilacoom to Fort Walla Walla.¹⁰⁰ Governor Isaac Stevens of Washington Territory directed Captain George McClellan of Civil War fame not only to survey and construct the road, but also to explore the Cascade Mountains for a possible route for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Since Captain McClellan neither explored the Cascades nor began construction of the road, the money that had been allotted to him remained unused and out of the reach of private citizens.¹⁰¹ Trying to lure emigrants in 1853 to Puget Sound, the citizens of Pierce and Thurston counties decided to donate the money themselves. Under the direction of Edward J. Allen of Olympia, men hewed a rough road to the summit of Naches Pass. A company of twenty-nine wagons known as "the Biles-Longmire party" traveled this road and became the first immigrant train to come directly across the Cascade Mountains into Puget Sound country.¹⁰² In 1854 Governor Stevens relieved Captain McClellan of his duty and gave Lieutenant Arnold the task of completing the road.

On September 26, 1854, near the summit of Naches Pass, the Ebeys met Lieutenant Arnold and Edward Allen, who were directing the completion of the road.¹⁰³ After 1854 few emigrants ever traveled this



The Ebey party camped near Fort Laramie on June 18, 1854. This sketch of the fort was drawn by Frederick Piercy about a year previously.

route; its narrowness, the fording of the Naches River some sixty-eight times, and the scarcity of grass along Green and White Rivers were causes of its abandonment. In addition, 1854 was the last year the government allotted money for the development of the road; later surveys, public sentiment, and a transfer of official favor to the Snoqualmie pass route killed any further plans.¹⁰⁴

Between Forts Hall and Boise the emigrants remained alert against Snake River Indian attacks; during August of 1854 the Snake River Indians made two attacks on the Ebey party. Near Willow Creek on the night of August 13 an arrow nearly struck one of the guards; that night the Indians made no further attacks, because, as Ebey believed, "they were afraid to attack as they found we were ready and not alarmed."¹⁰⁵ As the Ebeys continued over a section of the Salmon Mountains, on August 13, an arrow hit close to the head of Ebey who noted, "The arrow was probably shot to see if we were on guard."¹⁰⁶ After this incident the Ebeys had no further Indian trouble.

On August 24 the Ebeys arrived at the scene of the Ward Massacre. A few days earlier, near present Middletown, Idaho, the wagon train of

Ward and Adams of Missouri met sixty Indians who tried to steal the emigrants' cattle. A fight commenced in which the Indians killed all thirteen emigrants and stole about sixty head of cattle and \$2,000 in gold. In his diary Ebey recorded:

Two miles brought us to the scene of the late fight. Everything showed signs of a hard struggle. Six bodies lay by the road partly covered by persons who had been here before. We got out spades and some of us stoped and gave them a decent burial. The ground is covered with blood. The tent poles and a great amount of half burnt feathers lay around. No waggons left. I picked up a hat with two bullet holes in it and saturated with blood. I presume the owner received the ball in the head. This gun barrel belonged to a Saul Mulligan of Mo., who fought with it untill he was killed. A gun barrel was picked up with the stick broke off and badly bent. . . . After burying the dead I put a notice to those behind to be on their guard and overtook the waggons. Every man now goes armed.¹⁰⁷

Aware of the Indian danger, the emigrants put up a double guard, checked and rechecked all their guns, and continued to Fort Boise.

On October 12, 1854, the overland trip of the Jacob Ebey family was completed. They calculated they had traveled 2,192 miles in 169 days. Winfield Ebey concluded his diary notations with a criticism of the route traveled and a final comment on the trip:

From our starting point . . . we found the road to the Mo. River excellent, to Fort Laramie on the Platte good with some exception of some sand with plenty of water and grass. Thru hilly and mountainous with a scarcity of grass through the Black Hills, road good but grass scarce to Green River, thru mountains with excellent grass and water to Fort Hall on Snake River, down the Snake the road is generally rough at times water and grass is scarce, but generally both are plenty to the Columbia River, then we have to cross the Cascades one of the most rugged ranges of mountains in North America. On the whole the trip has been a pleasant one and I think there is no part of my life to which I shall look back with more pleasure than the last 169 days.¹⁰⁸

The overland trip revealed that 1854 was similar to other years of overland travel. Emigrants first prepared for the long trip; the Ebeys purchased cattle, oxen, wagons, and supplies and became familiar with two guide books. In 1854 Independence and Council Bluffs were both places of final preparations. Pawnee and Snake Indians made raids on the Ebeys as they had done on earlier wagon trains.

By 1854 numerous changes had taken place in overland travel. More emigrants now traveled the Mormon Trail on the north side of the Platte. A temporary settlement was located at Sublette's crossing of

Green River, while many of the sulphur springs at Beer and Soda Springs were drying up. Hudson's Bay Company Forts Hall, Boise, and Walla Walla were in such disuse that they proved of little value to the emigrant.

Winfield Ebey was like the diarists of overland travel in many respects; certain diary notations, however, classify him as an individualist. He noted that Castle Bluffs was just as interesting as the nearby rock formations; he pictured Chimney Rock as a tall haystack with a pole in it. He differentiated between Beer and Soda Springs, and was critical of any business enterprise on the plains, such as Rishaw's bridge on the Platte. Nevertheless, Winfield Ebey joined the ranks of those who bore the hardship of overland travel to find that elusive dream in the West.

NOTES

1. Merrill J. Mattes in his *The Great Platte River Road*, published by the Nebraska State Historical Society, lists the Ebey diary as one of his primary sources.

2. *Blackhawk War Papers*, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield.

3. L. A. Kibbee, editor, "Diary of Isaac N. Ebey and Emily Ebey," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, XXXIII (July, 1942), 297; herein cited as Kibbee, "Diary."

4. Isaac Ebey to Winfield Ebey, February 2, 1852; in Winfield Ebey Manuscript Collection, University of Washington Library, Seattle; herein cited as Ebey Papers.

5. Isaac Ebey to Winfield Ebey, March 22, 1853, Ebey Papers; see also H. H. Bancroft, *History of Washington, Idaho, and Montana, 1855-1890*. (Volume XXXI, *Works of H. H. Bancroft*, San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), 51.

6. Winfield Ebey to Isaac Ebey, March 5, 1852; May 9, 1852; June 30, 1853; Ebey Papers.

7. Winfield Ebey Diary No. 1; April 26, 1854; herein cited as diary, number, and date. Little is known of Winfield Ebey's early life and education; he kept a diary from 1854 to 1865. It is on the basis of this diary that the Ebey trip of 1854 will be re-created.

8. Kibbee, "Diary," 298.

9. Victor Farrar, editor, "Diary Kept by Colonel I. N. Ebey and Mrs. Ebey," *Washington Historical Review*, VII (October, 1916), 242.

10. Diary No. 1, May 15, 1854.

11. William Clayton, *The Latter Day Saints Emigrant's Guide* (St. Louis: North Republican Steam Power Press, 1848); Hosea B. Horn, *Overland Guide* (New York: 1852).

12. Mae Urbanek, "1852 on the Oregon Trail," *Annals of Wyoming*, XXX (April, 1962), 55; Helen B. Kroll, "The Books that Enlightened the Emigrants," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XIV (June, 1944), 120.
13. Diary No. 1, April 26, 1854.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Diary No. 1, April 27, 1854.
16. Leslie D. Shaffer, "The Management of Organized Wagon Trains on the Overland Trail," *Missouri Historical Review*, XII (July, 1961), 162.
17. Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1964), 67.
18. David Mott, "Abandoned Towns of Iowa," *Annals of Iowa*, XVIII (October, 1931), 127.
19. Diary No. 1, May 3, 1854.
20. Diary No. 1, May 2, 1854.
21. There has been confusion over early names of Council Bluffs. Winfield Ebe referred to it as "Bluff City," one of the names which the Iowans and Missourians of the 1850's used. In 1827 Francis Guittar was appointed agent of the American Fur Company to establish a post there that was called Hart's Bluffs. Federal Writers' Project, *The Oregon Trail* (New York: Hastings House, 1939), 52; herein cited as Writers' Project, *The Oregon Trail*; D. C. Bloomer, "Early Names of Council Bluffs," *Annals of Iowa*, II (July, 1896), 480. The next name was Miller's Hollow, then Kanesville, derived from Col. Thomas L. Kane, friend of the Mormons, who in 1846 mustered the Mormon Battalion into service. In 1852 the Mormons moved into Utah; since the Mormons ruled both church and town, it was for a time without government. The remaining inhabitants adopted the name Council Bluffs. Writers' Project, *The Oregon Trail*, 53.
22. Diary No. 1, May 10, 1854.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. Diary No. 1, May 13, 1854.
26. James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 64.
27. The term "Black Hills" was used by travelers of the 1850's to describe rugged terrain north of the Platte in present-day Wyoming.
28. Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, Vol. I, (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 1954), 67; herein cited as Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*; W. S. Ghent, *The Road to Oregon* (New York: Longman, Green and Company, 1925), III; herein cited as Ghent, *Road to Oregon*.
29. Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 505-524.
30. Ghent, *Road to Oregon*, 54.
31. Harrison C. Clark, "The Organization of the Oregon Emigration Company," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XVI (September, 1915), 215.
32. Diary No. 1, May 15, 1854.
33. Diary No. 1, May 21, 1854.
34. Diary No. 1, May 15, 1854.
35. *Ibid.*; Robert Cleland and Juanite Brooks, editors, *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848-1876* (San Marino: California Huntington Library, 1955), 31.

36. LeRoy Hafen, editor, *Overland Routes in 1859* (Glendale, Cal.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1942), 101.
37. Diary No. 1, May 16, 1854.
38. Diary No. 1, May 28, 1854.
39. Diary No. 1, June 27, 1854.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Diary No. 1, May 24, 1854.
42. Diary No. 1, May 25, 1854.
43. Diary No. 1, May 12, 1854.
44. Diary No. 1, May 16, 1854.
45. Diary No. 1, May 26, 1854.
46. J. S. Chambers, *The Conquest of Cholera* (New York: McMillan Company, 1938), 17; herein cited as Chambers, *Conquest of Cholera*.
47. Diary No. 1, June 9, 1854.
48. Chambers, *Conquest of Cholera*, 241.
49. Diary No. 1, June 20, 1854.
50. Diary No. 1, May 13, 1854.
51. Diary No. 1, June 11, 1854.
52. Merrill J. Mates, "Chimney Rock on the Oregon Trail," *Nebraska History*, XXXVI (March, 1955), 4.
53. Dale Morgan, editor, *The Overland Diary of James Pritchard* (Denver: Fred A. Rosenthal, 1959), 75; herein cited as Morgan, *Diary of Pritchard*.
54. Clarence Bagley, "Along the Oregon Trail in 1852," *Motor Life*, V (February, 1924), 15; herein cited as Bagley, "Along the Oregon Trail."
55. Diary No. 1; June 14, 1854.
56. Merrill J. Mates, "Hiram Scott—Fur Trader," *Nebraska History*, XXIII, (July-September, 1945), 237; Washington Irving, *The Works of Washington Irving* (New York, 1911), 34.
57. Richard Burton, *Look of the West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 97.
58. Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California* (Santa Ana, Cal.: Fine Arts Press, 1936), 35.
59. Diary No. 1, June 15, 1854.
60. The Ebey train passed through western Nebraska before the Sioux had become warlike following the Grattan Massacre (August 19, 1854) and the Battle of Blue Water (September 3, 1855). Prior to the Grattan affair the Sioux were comparatively peaceful. On the other hand, the Pawnee in eastern Nebraska were a constant nuisance, yet never seriously impeded the white man. See William Peterson, *The Story of Iowa* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1952); Clark Wissler, *Indians of the United States* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1946); Donald F. Danker, editor, *Luther North: Man of the Plains, 1856-82* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).
61. Washington Irving, *Crayon Miscellany* (New York, 1869), 78.
62. Diary No. 1, May 11, 1854; May 15, 1854.
63. Diary No. 1, May 21, 1854.
64. Diary No. 1, May 23, 1854.
65. Diary No. 1, June 11, 1854.
66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*
68. Diary No. 1, May 26, 1854.
69. Diary No. 1, June 1, 1854.
70. Bagley, "Along the Oregon Trail," 10.
71. Diary No. 1, June 2, 1854.
72. Diary No. 1, July 10, 1854.
73. Diary No. 1, July 13, 1854; Kenneth Spaulding, editor, *Robert Stuart's Journey of Discovery, 1812-1813* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 53.
74. Diary No. 1, July 13, 1854.
75. Diary No. 1, July 19, 1854.
76. Diary No. 1, September 26, 1854.
77. Robert Walkinshaw, *On Puget Sound* (New York: George Putnam's Sons, 1929), 67; Albert and Jane Salisbury, *Here Rolled the Covered Wagons* (Seattle, Superior Publishing Company, 1948), 90.
78. *Olympia Pioneer and Democrat*, September 15, 1854; Ebey's account of the trip appeared in the October 15, 1854, issue of the paper.
79. Diary No. 1, July 21, 1854.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Ibid.*
82. Overton Johnson and William Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains in 1843* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1932), 58; herein cited as Johnson and Winter, *Across the Rocky Mountains*.
83. Morgan, *Diary of Pritchard*, 123; Bagley, "Along the Oregon Trail," 32.
84. Diary No. 1, July 15, 1854.
85. Diary No. 1, July 26, 1854.
86. Johnson and Winter. *Across the Rocky Mountains*, 24.
87. Morgan, *Diary of Pritchard*, 102.
88. James Nesmith, "The Diary of the Emigration of 1843," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, VII (December, 1906), 352.
89. Johnson and Winter, *Across the Rocky Mountains*, 193.
90. Bagley, "Along the Oregon Trail," 16.
91. D. B. Ward, *Across the Plains in 1853* (Seattle, 1911), 49-50.
92. Diary No. 2, September 3, 1854.
93. Lansford Hastings, *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1932), 38; Diary No. 2, September 3, 1854.
94. Brigham D. Madsen, *Bannock of Idaho* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1958), 57; Bagley, "Along the Oregon Trail," 14.
95. Diary No. 1, July 31, 1854.
96. *Ibid.*
97. *Ibid.*
98. Diary No. 2, August 25, 1854.
99. Clarence Hines, "The Erection of Fort Nez Perce," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XV (December, 1939), 327.
100. *Olympia Columbian*, January 22, 1853; March 15, 1853.
101. Thomas W. Prosch, "The Military Roads of Washington Territory," *Washington Historical Quarterly*, II (May, 1908), 119-120.

102. *Olympia Columbian*, October 15, 1853.
103. Diary No. 2, September 26, 1854.
104. Prosch, "Military Roads," 121.
105. Diary No. 1, August 13, 1854.
106. *Ibid.*
107. Diary No. 2, August 24, 1854; see also *Olympia Pioneer and Democrat*, September 16, 1854; October 23, 1854.
108. Diary No. 2, October 12, 1854.