

# POEMS OF THE COVERED WAGONS



EDITED BY ALFRED POWERS

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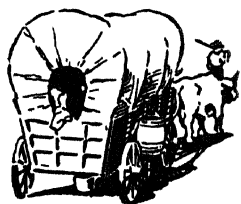
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POEMS OF THE COVERED WAGONS



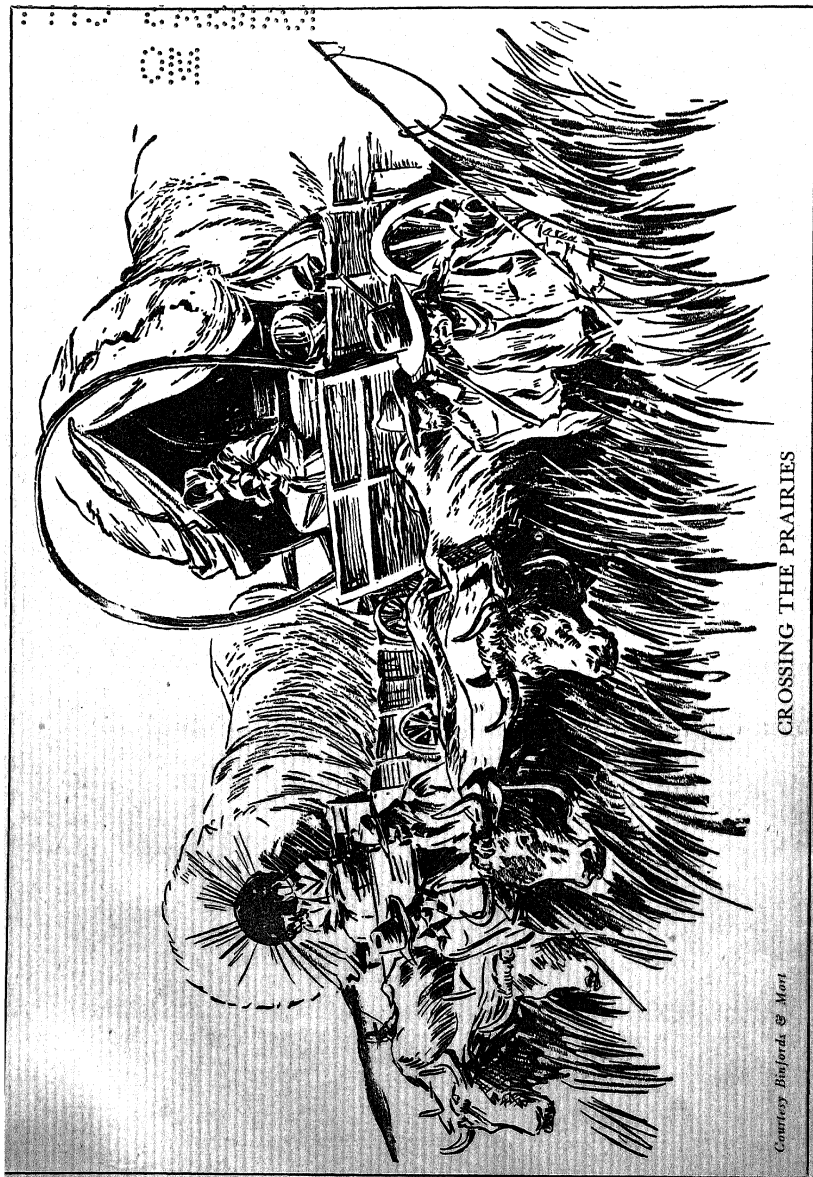
## COMING OF THE WHITE MAN

*WILLIAM P. BURNS*

HE CAME from out the Land of Morning, bred of pallid races;  
He spoke a mystic mother-tongue and bore an alien name;  
He blazed the trails of Empire into vast forbidden places;  
He stayed a while and conquered there and vanished as he came.

And all the land was shaken as when speaks the dreaded Thunder:—  
The red chief stormed in council with the wisdom of a child,  
The bison raised his massive head and stared in stupid wonder,  
The sullen grizzly reigned no more the despot of the wild. . .

No wreath of fame nor marble shaft rewards his meek endeavor,  
Nor vainly worded verses tell the valor that he gave;  
But arrow-wood is blooming and a wild brook sings forever  
Where forest shadows darken on the pioneer's grave.



CROSSING THE PRAIRIES

Courtesy, Binford & Mori

# *Poems of the Covered Wagons*

*Edited by*

ALFRED POWERS

*Illustrated with old drawings*

Portland, Oregon

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1947

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## EDITOR'S NOTE



CONSIDERING THE GREAT MASS of prose the big over-land emigrations have brought forth, one might expect to find a corresponding quantity of covered-wagon poetry. Such is not the case; the verse is rather scant. The discrepancy in the amounts comes from the fact that the former was written very largely by those who took part in the long pioneer journeyings, and the latter depended on stay-at-home poets who found other topics more familiar and more conventionally suited to their rhymes. Sam Simpson and Joaquin Miller were the earlier writers who most clearly saw the human movements over the long trails as poetry material. Some of the best covered-wagon poems have been written by later poets.

Many of the selections as printed here have been substantially reduced from their original length. The object has been to portray the population surges over the emigrant routes rather than to present poems in a nineteenth-century fullness that might be tedious for readers of today. The material has previously appeared in a widely-scattered way in newspapers and periodicals and isolatedly in books. This seems to be the first attempt to bring the significant portion of covered-wagon poetry into a single volume.

ALFRED POWERS

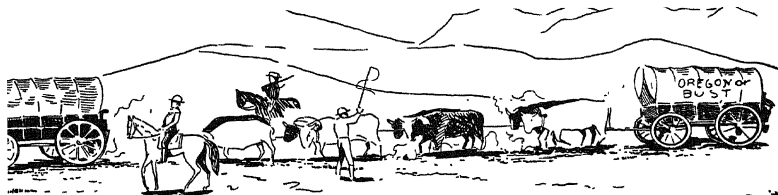
*Portland, Oregon*  
*August, 1947*



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*The horse and ox, the wheel and whip  
To strain and groan and roll and crack  
O'er the weary and lonesome track  
Where stretched away to the end of day  
The grinding Western trail*

—E. I. DENNY

\* \* \*

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### DECORATIONS

From wood cuts, old prints, and a few recent drawings.

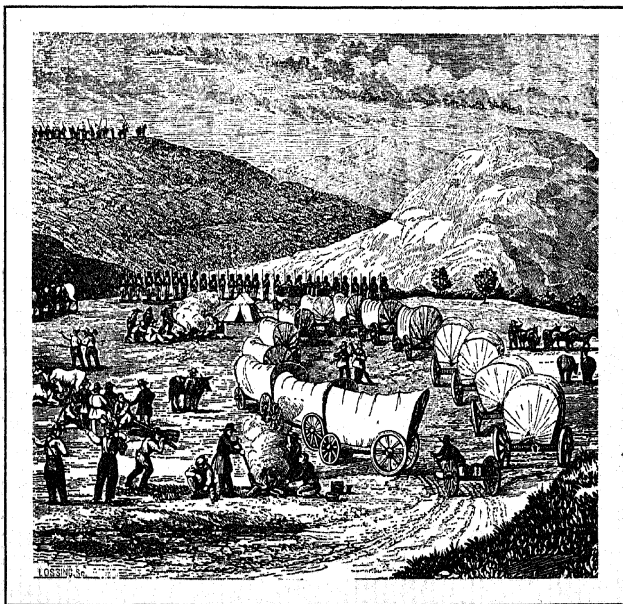
# 1

BY THE NOTED POETS

*He shall desire loneliness, and his  
desire shall bring*

*Hard on his heels  
A thousand wheels. . .*

RUDYARD KIPLING



## **BY THE NOTED POETS**

A great and exciting overland exodus west  
But unconcerned, indifferent eastern poets

**I**N 1890, WHEN THE Portland High School, Oregon, held a Lowell evening, a member of the committee received a letter from the poet, who was then 71 and who died the next year. Following are the first four sentences of the letter:

I feel as if I had a kind of birthright in your Portland, for it was a townsman of mine who first led an expedition thither across the plains, and tried to establish a settlement there. I well remember his starting sixty years ago, and knew him well in after years. He was a very remarkable person whose conversation I valued highly. A born leader of men, he was fitly called *Captain* Nathaniel Wyeth as long as he lived. . . .

James Russell Lowell, with such a neighbor as Captain Wyeth, builder of Fort Hall, wrote west-less poetry. We have "The Pioneer", printed in this section, as about the total inspiration he received from the great overland surge of Americans.

Longfellow, who never even visited the scene of his *Evangeline*, lived in Cambridge without much consciousness of covered wagons. Poe and Holmes found no themes for poems in the emigrations. Whittier wrote one much-quoted piece, partly included here. And even the magnificent and all-embracing Walt contributed a poem to this volume only synthetically. Said Stedman about it all: "No material, no stirring theme, with all your freedom, your conquest, your noble woods and waters, your westward spread of men!" Stedman himself wrote poems but not about the pioneer trails.

WESTERN LINES

WALT WHITMAN

THE MISSOURIAN crosses the plains, toting his wares and his cattle.

\* \* \*

Oxen that rattle the yoke and chain, or halt in the leafy shade!  
what is that you express in your eyes?

It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.

\* \* \*

I see the vast deserts of Western America.

\* \* \*

The prairie grass dividing—its special odor breathing. . .

\* \* \*

Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and  
lonesome prairie;

Where the herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square  
miles far and near.

\* \* \*

See, beyond the Kansas, countless herds of buffalo, feeding  
on short, curly grass.

\* \* \*

Aware of the buffalo herds, grazing the plains—the hirsute and  
strong-breasted bull.

\* \* \*

Night on the prairies;

The supper is over—the fire on the ground burns low;

The wearied emigrants sleep, wrapt in their blankets:

I walk by myself—I stand and look at the stars, which I think  
now I never realized before.

THE BISON TRACK

*BAYARD TAYLOR*



SEE! A dusky line approaches: hark, the  
onward-surging roar,  
Like the din of wintry breakers on a  
sounding wall of shore!  
Dust and sand behind them whirling, snort  
the foremost of the van,  
And their stubborn horns are clashing  
through the crowded caravan.



Now the storm is down upon us: let the  
maddened horses go!  
We shall ride the living whirlwind, though  
a hundred leagues it blow!  
Though the cloudy manes should thicken,  
and the red eyes' angry glare  
Lighten round us as we gallop through  
the sand and rushing air!



THE PRAIRIES

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

THE BEAVER builds  
No longer by these streams, but far away,  
On waters whose blue surface ne'er gave back  
The white man's face—among Missouri's springs,  
And pools whose issues swell the Oregon—  
He rears his little Venice.

In these plains  
The bison feeds no more. Twice twenty leagues  
Beyond remotest smoke of hunter's camp,  
Roams the majestic brute, in herds that shake  
The earth with thundering steps—yet here I meet  
His ancient footprints stamped beside the pool.

[I] think I hear  
The sound of that advancing multitude  
Which soon shall fill these deserts. From the ground  
Comes up the laugh of children, the soft voice  
Of maidens, and the sweet and solemn hymn  
Of Sabbath worshippers; the low of herds  
Blends with the rustling of the heavy grain  
Over the dark brown furrows.

All at once  
A fresher wind sweeps by, and breaks my dream,  
And I am in the wilderness alone.

I HEAR THE TREAD OF PIONEERS

*JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER*

I hear the tread of pioneers  
Of nations yet to be;  
The first low wash of waves, where soon  
Shall roll a human sea.

The rudiments of empire here  
Are plastic yet and warm;  
The chaos of a mighty world  
Is rounding into form!

Each rude and jostling fragment soon  
Its fitting place shall find,—  
The raw material of a State,  
Its muscle and its mind!

And, westering still, the star which leads  
The New World in its train  
Has tipped with fire the icy spears  
Of many a mountain chain.

The snowy cones of Oregon  
Are kindling on its way;  
And California's golden sands  
Gleam brighter in its ray.

## THE PIONEER

*JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL*

WHAT man would live confined with brick and stone,  
Imprisoned from the healing touch of air,  
And cramped with selfish landmarks everywhere,  
When all before him stretches, furrowless and lone,  
The unmapped prairie none can fence or own?

What man would read and read the selfsame faces,  
And, like the marbles which the windmill grinds,  
Rub smooth forever with the same smooth minds,  
This year retracing last year's, every year's, dull traces,  
When there are woods and un-penfolded spaces?

Come out, then, from the old thoughts and old ways,  
Before you harden to a crystal cold  
Which the new life can shatter, but not mould;  
Freedom for you still waits, still, looking backward, stays,  
But widens still the irretrievable space.

\* \* \*

*The rush to California . . . and the attitude, not merely of merchants, but of philosophers and prophets, so called, in relation to it, reflect the greatest disgrace on mankind.*

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

THE MOVERS

*WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS*

PARTING was over at last, and all the good-bys had  
    been spoken.  
Up the long hill-side the white-tented wagon moved slowly,  
Bearing the mother and children while onward before them  
    the father  
Trudged with his gun on his arm, and the faithful house-dog  
    beside him,  
Grave and sedate, as if knowing the sorrowful thoughts of his  
    master.

ROUTE OF THE EMIGRANT WAGONS

*HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW*

Far in the west there lies a desert land, where  
    the mountains  
Lift, through perpetual snows, their lofty and  
    luminous summits.  
Down from their jagged, deep ravines, where the  
    gorge, like a gateway,  
Opens a passing rude to the wheels of the emigrant's  
    wagon,  
Westward the Oregon flows and the Walleway and  
    the Owyhee.

# 2

BY THE EMIGRANTS

*Westward the course of empire takes its way.*

GEORGE BERKELEY



## BY THE EMIGRANTS

A group of "primitives" by those who themselves crossed the plains in covered wagons.

**T**HE VAST LITERATURE LEFT by the covered-wagon pioneers has for a hundred years been accumulating, and is still being extensively printed. Emigrant records are of two kinds—immediate noting of their experiences and what they wrote reminiscently. The former consisted of letters to friends and relatives, accounts sent back to the home papers, journals, and diaries. The latter is in the form of biographies or ghost-writing or interviews or first-hand chronicles.

Emigrant literary energy is all the more remarkable because it went on in spite of poor opportunities for any kind of journalizing. The women particularly had an intense urge to write that would not be discouraged. With bodies fatigued by tasks of the day, they nevertheless stole time from sleep or used a brief period of rest to put down what they had been through—to report experiences and emotions that had only just ceased or that were still in process. It was a literature that reflected the vividness of vivid lives; it was the most democratic of all literatures because hundreds wrote it.

Prose was naturally the language of these crossing-the-plains narratives. There was practically no on-the-spot rhyming along the trails, except some extemporizing by the Forty-Niners, but there were a few reminiscences in verse and a few emigrant-written poems of a less personal nature, four of which are printed in this section.



CROSSING THE PLAINS

*BELLE W. COOKE*

DID you ever cross the Plains,  
Where they wear the hickory shirt,  
Where the eyes get used to smoke,  
And the face begrimed with dirt?  
Did you cross the muddy river,  
More noted than the Styx,  
And begin your journey Westward,  
"All in a cart and six"?

Have you traveled through the sand,  
Up the famous river Platte,  
Where the bluffs are so romantic,  
And the water tastes so flat!  
Have you camped out in a hail-storm  
When the wind was blowing high,  
Upsetting tents and wagons,  
And making children cry?

Did you get up in the morning,  
Feeling somewhat water-soaked,  
And finding cattle missing,  
Did you never get provoked?  
And while you hunted cattle,  
Did the muddy little creek  
Rise like a second deluge  
And keep you there a week?

Did you see "vast herds of bison,  
Rolling like the mighty main!"  
Or was it but a couple  
Five miles across the plain?  
Did you tread on rattlesnakes,  
And on fields of prickly-pear,  
Till you wished yourself at home again,  
Or any place but there?

Did you travel long, hot days  
And never see a spring,  
Till just at night you came to one  
You fancied "just the thing"?  
Did you seize a cup in haste  
And think to drink it dry,  
When, lo! 'twas almost boiling hot,  
Or strong with alkali!

Did you see the glorious landscapes  
Spread out before the eye,  
As you climbed the rocky ridges,  
Or stood on mountains high?  
Did your wagons tip up end-wise,  
As you rattled down the hill;  
Or did you let them down with ropes  
In places steeper, still?

Did you slide down "Laurel Hill,"  
When the rain was falling fast,  
And with one yoke of "cows"  
Did you reach the goal at last?

## PIONEER OF FIFTY-THREE

*By MRS. S. WATSON HAMILTON*

At Council Bluffs we reached the starting point,  
And there were new provisions for the way,  
And carefully the coming months we count  
For which we must in store sufficient lay.

. . . game upon the plains was scarce that year.  
The forward trains no doubt found game ahead,  
But for the trains behind they did not spare  
But drove the timid creatures from the road,  
And it was seldom that we got a share.

Tho' milk was plenty, furnished by our herd,  
And butter in our jolting wagons churned,  
No fresh canned fruit was in our wagons stored,  
Who how to seal it then had never learned.

Now fuel became scarce, the chips were few  
That buffalo had dropped while feeding there  
That thick in former years the plain doth strew  
And furnished fuel for the camper's fire.

On flue dug in the ground we coffee boiled  
And cooked our bacon, beans and rice;  
And soon to our "hardtack" got reconciled  
Where baking was not done at any price.

We aimed to make twenty miles a day  
But often ten was more than we could go;  
So many things would happen to delay  
And make a cattle train to travel slow.

The treeless plain that far as eye could reach,  
No feature save the river gave to view  
To break the sameness of the tiresome stretch  
That we were two whole months in passing through.

Near Independence Rock the Fourth was spent,  
Though little heed was given to the day;  
One loud hurrah was by the drovers sent  
As past the rock they marched upon the way.

The plains were varied . . .  
'Tis here the prairie dogs their kennels build  
And close beside their doors the creatures watch;  
Large tracts were with their cunning burrows filled  
That timid were, and far too spry to catch.

A thousand miles we traveled on the Platte  
And faced the western sun as it went down,  
By buffalo and savage people met  
And graves that by the way were thickly strewn.

That was a dreadful place in which to die,  
But scores have stopped upon those plains at eve  
And died that night, and ere the sun was high  
Next day, their friends must bury them and leave.

The dust was alkaline, and constant care  
To keep the stock from water was required  
That stood in pools and poison streamlets there  
And by their dust-bred thirst was strong desired.

And goggles for the eyes in fashion came  
For men in poisonous dust compelled to drive;  
But breathing it the nostrils doth inflame  
And men and beasts alike in torture live.

One starlit night, I still remember well,  
That seemed peculiar for its perfect rest;  
All things appeared to me so strangely still  
I wondered could it be that it would last.

Their cuds the cattle had begun to chew  
As tho' they were prepared to spend the night;  
The watchful guard beyond was resting too,  
For nothing to alarm appeared in sight.

Then without warning up the cattle rose,  
As tho' some simultaneous blow was struck;  
With tails erect and eye that wildly glows  
In one mad gallop from the fold they break.

Far distant we could see the blackened mass  
That with one single impulse seemed to move,  
And bellowed hoarse and loud as they press,  
And horsemen fleet pursued the angry drove.

The crossing of the Snake was a scene!  
Our brutes were forced to swim the ugly stream,  
And from the bank we watched them coming through,  
And saw a fav'rite horse to weaken seem  
And in a moment disappear from view.

And salmon first was in Snake River seen  
By Indians brought and to our camp supplied;  
It was a treat, our appetites were keen,  
And freely every camper bought and fried.

The dread of travelers was the Cascade Range  
That only could be crossed in summer time;  
And our conditions now we must arrange  
To cross it ere the stormy weather came.

#### AN EMIGRANT REMEMBERS

*T. J. KIRK*

WE launched into the vast, broad plains  
The crack of whips and clank of chains  
Could be heard all along the line.

On those vast, extended plains,  
Far in the distance, went other trains,  
Moving onward, sure, but slow.



Courtesy California Historical Society      **SUNDAY ON THE PLAINS**

THE OREGON TRAIL

JOSEPH W. DORR

*Ox Team*

SO GEE haw, Buck, and buck haw, Bright!  
And make the ox bows squeak,  
And we'll sight the old Missouri  
Before the end of the week.

*Platte River*

INEBRIATE STREAM with shifting course  
Your meanderings to and fro,  
The dissipation of your course,  
Can no man ever know?

*The Mirage*

STRANGE VISION of the plains;  
Ignus fatus of the toil-worn travelers' dreams  
Relentless, cruel, but surpassing fair  
With all thy beauteous lakes and streams.

*The Graves*

MAYBE A piece of sideboard, perchance a heap of stones,  
Or possibly an endboard to mark the resting bones . . .  
Upon the desert highway and in the mountain shade,  
Where fell the dead of Fifty-two their silent graves are made.



*Sage Brush*

LIKE FLOCKS of startled sheep,  
The gray clumps cluster on the knolls,  
Silent, suggestive, mysterious, where  
The prairie's quiet ocean rolls . . .  
Each passing day a waiting flock  
On some new hill is seen,  
Nor seem to fear the sly coyote  
Whose shadow steals between.

*Indians*

A BARRIER of wheels forbids  
The curious braves' approach;  
The language of a rifle's mouth  
Speaks plainly: "Don't encroach!"

*Buffaloes*

LIKE SOME mighty turbid river,  
Comes the surging, thundering herd . . .  
Endless seems the mighty sweeping  
Stream of rolling, heaving life,  
Roaring on with power resistless,  
And with awful danger rife.

*The Plains*

THE PILGRIMS plodded on their way  
Through spiney cactus, sage brush gray;  
With wagon box for ferry, crossed  
The rivers from the mountains tossed.

*The Coyote*

EVER PRESENT serenader,  
With his multivoiced refrain,  
Howling, whining, yelping, squealing,  
Over hill and over plain.

*The Jackrabbit*

WITH EARS like exclamation points  
The jackrabbit with supple joints  
Leaps gaily, while the pilgrims stare.  
He bounds along and doesn't care. . .

*The Alkali*

THEY CROSS the frost-like alkali,  
These pilgrims who are like to die.  
With thirst they here cannot allay,  
With burning throats push on all day.

*Chimney Rock*

THEY PASS the landmarks by the way,  
Tall Chimney Rock, which pointing gray,  
Speaks mutely of an ancient day.

*Mount Hood*

WITH TAPERING finger pointing high,  
Mt. Hood the pilgrims soon descry;  
They glad approach its snowy peak.  
Beyond they know's the home they seek.

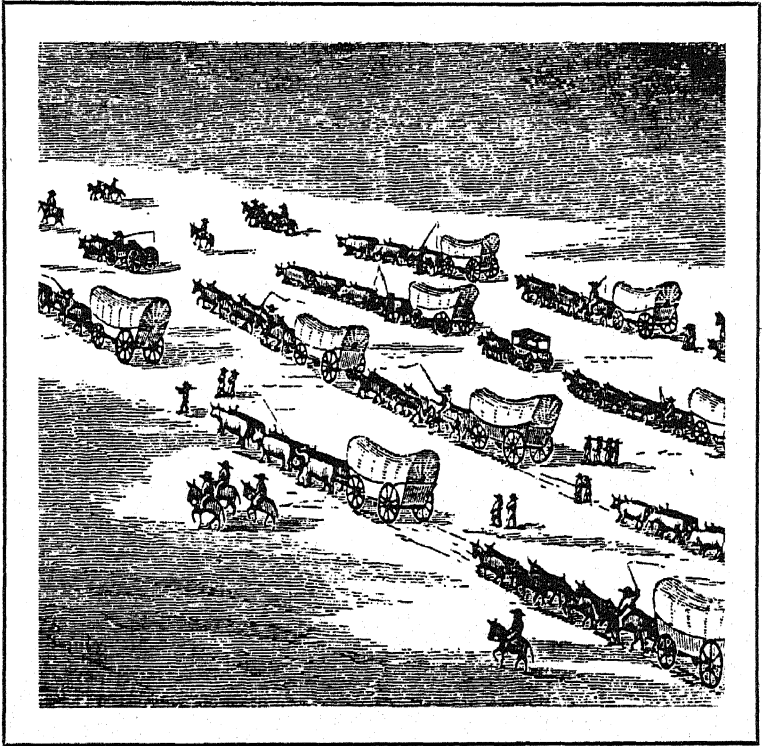
# 3

THE SANTA FE TRAIL

*Olivia: There lies your way, due west.*

*Viola: Then westward-ho!*

SHAKESPEARE: TWELFTH NIGHT



## **THE SANTA FE TRAIL**

The Santa Fe trade commenced in 1822.  
Two years later wagons were introduced.

**P**ART OF JOSIAH GREGG'S table of distances of the Santa Fe Trail:

Places	Miles
Independence	0
Council Grove	145
Little Arkansas	229
Arkansas River	265
Pawnee Fork	298
Ford of the Arkansas	387
Cimarron River	445
Willow Bar	525
Rabbit Ear Creek	575
Rio Colorado	630
Rio Gallinas (Las Vegas)	699
Pecos Village	755
Santa Fe	780

FROM INDEPENDENCE, with all things favorable, the outward journey could be made in six weeks, though difficulties sometimes prolonged it by a week or two. It was a journey but rarely free from trials and dangers. There was the peril of drouth, particularly across the dreaded jornada, the stretch of sixty waterless miles in the southwestern part of what we now call Kansas.

—W. J. GHENT

## OLIVER WIGGINS

*STANLEY VESTAL*

'Twas at the Cimarron Crossing  
On the trail to Santy Fee,  
Kit Carson met up with a caravan  
That was a sight to see.

The teamsters were all greenhorns,  
The wagon master a coward;  
Their wagon wheels were warped and shrunk,  
Their guns were all smooth-bored.

The only man in the outfit  
That had a speck of gall  
Was a boy named Oliver Wiggins—  
Fifteen, and six foot tall.

He was a-herdin' the cavvy,  
Ridin' a sore-backed mule,  
Totin' a pistol long as your arm—  
A runaway from school!

The Kiowas come charging  
To lift the teamsters' hair;  
Kit and his men from the wagons then  
Met the reds and stopped them there.

"Mount and after 'em boys!" yelled Kit  
As the redskins turned around;  
At every bullet the trappers fired  
Some Injun bit the ground.

The Carson men rode swift as the wind,  
The Kiowas fled from harm;  
In the front of the charge rode Oliver, poppin'  
A pistol—long as your arm!

The wagon master told the boy,  
"You acted like a fool!  
Them redskins might have took your hair,  
And I'd ha' lost a mule!"

Oliver said, "I want my pay—  
I'm through with the wagon train;  
I'm going to Taos with the Carson men—  
I'll not work for *you* again!"

"No, ye don't!" says the wagon master,  
"You'll go on to Santy Fee;  
I've told Kit's men to leave us now—  
Tonight you sleep with me!"

Kit Carson made his camp that night  
A mile from the wagon park;  
He sent Sol Silver to Oliver Wiggins  
A little after dark.



“Would ye like to be one o’ the Carson men  
And travel along o’ Kit?  
He got his start on a mule like yourn  
With a rope for bridle and bit.

“Wait till the greenhorns are all asleep  
And you see Kit’s campfire flare;  
Then slip away from the wagon train—  
Come dawn, we’ll be far from hyar.”

The wolves were howling loud and long,  
The wagon master snored,  
When Oliver Wiggins slipped away  
To where Kit’s campfire roared.

Said Kit, “My boy, I like your spunk;  
I’ll make a man of you;  
I’ll give you a rifle for that popgun,  
And buckskins for your coat of blue.

“Shoot straight and tell the truth,” Kit said,  
“Shoot straight, fight hard to win;  
The Carson men are all like that—  
They die, but don’t give in.”

For twelve long years young Oliver  
Served Carson true as steel;  
The Indians caught the wagon master  
And burned him on a wagon wheel.

LONE ELM CAMP GROUND

*[This poem was read at the dedication of the Santa Fe Trail marker at Lone Elm, Kansas, on November 9, 1906.]*

FIFTY years—'twas a prairie then,  
And the deer roamed wild and free;  
Fifty years—I see it again  
As it appeared to me.  
The old trail ran where the barn stands now;  
The trail was here long before the plow,  
And we drove ox teams, with sometimes a cow,  
In the day that used to be.

Fifty years—yes, I lived here then,  
And a lively place 'twas, too;  
Wagons for miles with their fearless men  
Coming and passing from view.  
On the wagon covers, "Pikes' Peak or Bust."  
Yes, the fever was high for the yellow dust,  
Just a lot of grit and their luck to trust,  
For those who won were few.

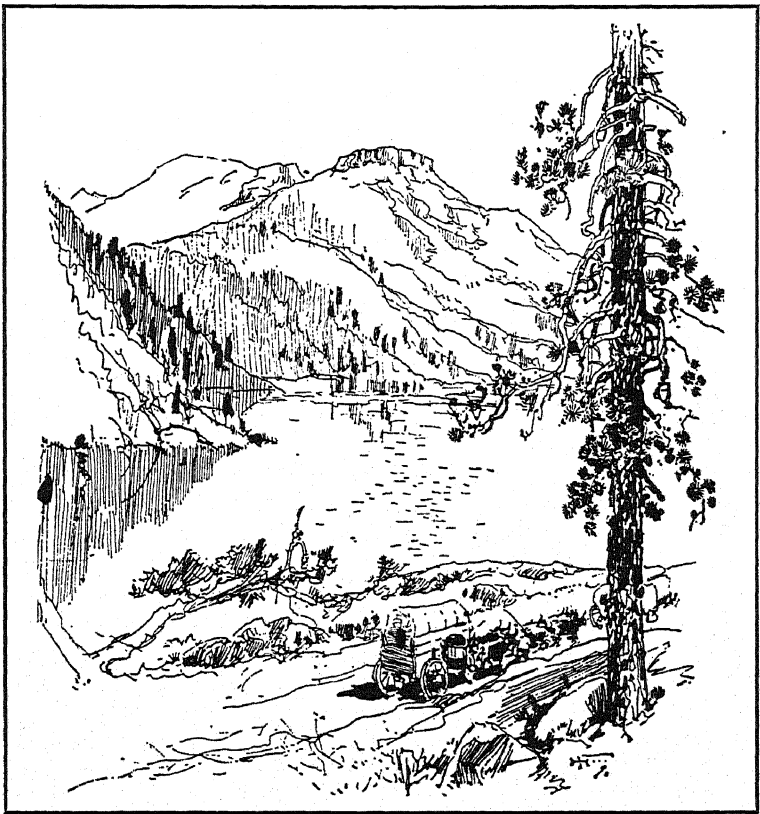
Fifty years—'twas a camping ground  
Where the trees now cast their shade.  
And the faithful oxen rambled round  
And rarely if ever strayed.  
And the camp fires burned each night in the year,  
In the pastures there and the corn fields here;  
Yet I slept each night with never a fear,  
And many friends I made. . .

# 4

THE OREGON TRAIL

*. . . Where the emigrant stands  
For a moment to gaze ere he flees from his hearth.*

LORD BYRON



## **THE OREGON TRAIL**

Independence, Scott's Bluff, Fort Bridger,  
Fort Hall, Oregon City . . . . . 1948 miles.

**T**HE OREGON TRAIL or, as the Indians termed it, The Big Medicine Road, was made by the emigration of 1843. The members of that train soon found that there must be an advance guard to clear the way. These fifteen or twenty men rode horseback ahead of the train, each armed with a rifle and carrying picks and shovels, to fight Indians if necessary, but to be sure to make a road the ox teams could draw the wagons over. This party made the road—the Oregon Trail—from day to day; across two thousand miles of plains, desert, sage brush, and mountains from the Missouri to the Columbia. And when the grand caravan of ox teams, loose cattle, horses and wagons passed over it, they left behind them a great wide road that all subsequent travelers and emigrations followed for more than twenty years and until the Union Pacific Railroad was opened.

—JOSEPH GASTON

TO THE NORTH lay a crooked silver ribbon, the Platte, making its tortured way between flat banks. But all that interested John in the desolate landscape was a slow-moving line of black-and-white dots along the south bank of the river. It was the caravan, starting on its day's journey.

—HONORE WILLISIE MORROW

## THE OREGON TRAIL (1843)

*ARTHUR GUITERMAN*

Two HUNDRED wagons, rolling out to Oregon,

Breaking through the gopher holes, lurching wide and free,  
Crawling through the mountain pass, creaking, grumbling,  
rolling on,

Two hundred wagons, rolling toward the sea.

From East and South and North they flock;  
they muster, row on row,

A fleet of ten-score prairie ships beside Missouri's flow.

The bullwhips crack, the oxen strain, the canvas-hooded files  
Are off upon the long, long trail of sixteen hundred miles.

The women hold the guiding lines; beside the rocking steers,  
With goad and ready rifle, walk the bearded pioneers  
Through clouds of dust beneath the sun, through floods of  
sweeping rain,

Across the Kansas prairie land, across Nebraska's plain.

Two hundred wagons, rolling out to Oregon,

Curved around the camp-fire flame at halt when day is done;  
Rest awhile beneath the stars, yoke again and lumber on,

Two hundred wagons, following the sun.

Among the barren buttes they wind beneath the jealous view  
Of Blackfoot, Pawnee, Omaha, Arapahoe and Sioux.

No savage threat may halt their course, no river deep and wide;  
They swim the Platte, they ford the Snake, they cross the Great  
Divide.

They march as once from India's vales, through Asia's mountain  
door,

With shield and spear on Europe's plains their fathers marched  
before.

They march where leaps the antelope and storms the buffalo,  
Still westward as their fathers marched ten thousand years ago.

Two hundred wagons rolling out to Oregon,

Creeping down the dark defile below the mountain crest,  
Surging through the brawling stream, lunging, plunging, forging  
on,

Two hundred wagons, rolling toward the West.

Now toils the dusty caravan with swinging wagon poles

Where Walla Walla pours along and broad Columbia rolls.

The long-haired trapper's face grows dark, and scowls the  
painted brave;

For where the beaver builds his dam the wheat and rye shall  
wave.

The British trader shakes his head and weighs his nation's loss;  
For where those hardy settlers come the Stars and Stripes will  
toss.

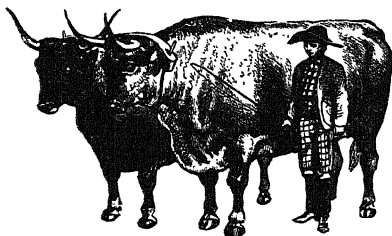
Then block the wheels, unyoke the steers; the prize is his who  
dares;

The cabins rise, the fields are sown, and Oregon is theirs!



They will take, they will hold,  
By the spade in the mold,  
By the seed in the soil,  
By the sweat and the toil,  
By the plow in the loam,  
By the school and the home!

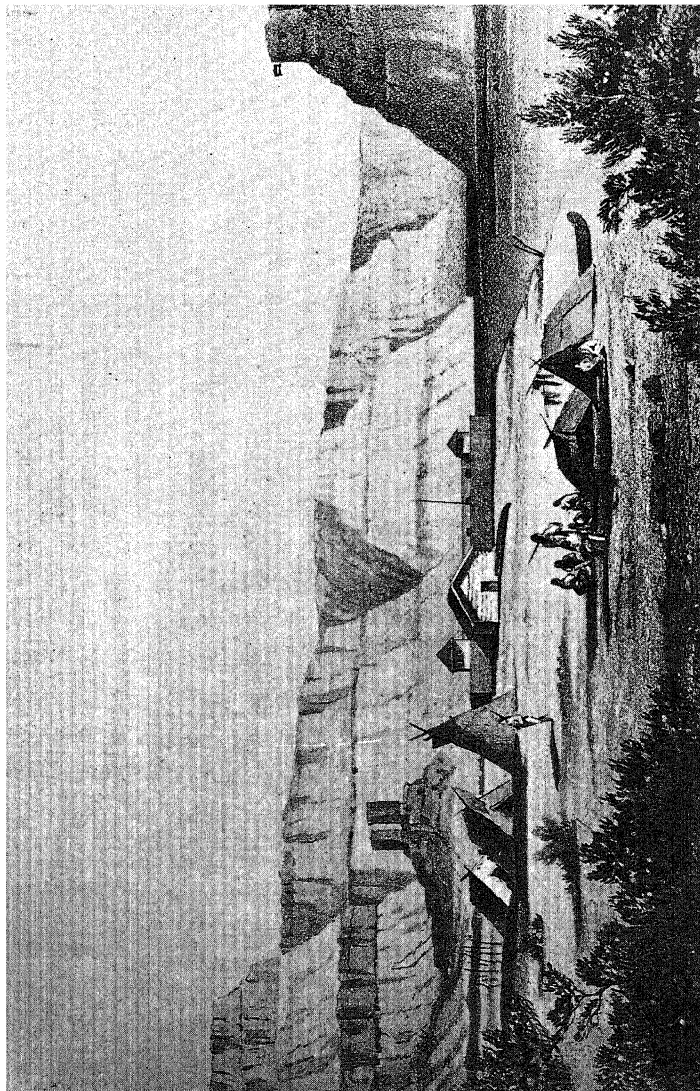
Two hundred wagons, rolling out to Oregon,  
Two hundred wagons, ranging free and far,  
Two hundred wagons, rolling, rumbling, rolling on,  
Two hundred wagons, following a star! .



### ALONG INDIAN TRAILS

*S. N. M. BYERS*

AND ON the trail where once the Indians went,  
The white-topped wagons of the pioneer  
Crept in long lines to some new settlement . . .



*Courtesy Oregon Historical Society* FORT WALLA WALLA ON THE COLUMBIA

## OREGON TRAIL: 1851

*JAMES MARSHALL*

OUT THEY came from Liberty, out across the plains,  
Two-stepping, single-footing, hard-boiled and easy-shooting  
Whips cracking: oaths snapping . . .

Hear those banjos wail—  
Emigratin' westward on the Oregon Trail.

Fight through the heathens, Rickarees and Sioux,  
Aim across the wagon-wheel and drill the varmints through.  
Line 'em up, line 'em out, pray the tugs'll hold,  
Wheels a-screeching glory through the sunset's gold;  
Keep y'r musket handy, trigger on the cock,  
Peel y'r eyes, kid, if you'd see old Independence Rock!  
Took our luck right in our hands; can't afford to fail—  
Hittin fr the westward on the bone-strewn trail.

Milt's woman had a kid. Nary doctor nigh,  
Milt thought he'd lose 'em; figured that they'd die;  
God's mercy pulled 'em through; Hallelujah, sing!  
Put y'r faith in God, friends, and conquer everything!  
Line them millin' leaders out; get the bulls a-goin'—  
Got to get to Oregon!

West winds blowing  
Bitter from the Stonies, looming blue ahead,  
Wagons bogged in prairie mud, teams stuck fast,

Heave the tumbled baggage off, clean the wagon bed,  
Sweat and curse and on again, freed at last,  
On again and buck the rain, buck the wind and hail—  
Emigration westward on the Oregon Trail.

Onward through the mountains, lifting to the blue,  
Up and through the rock cuts, weaving to the pass;  
Old Ezra stopped here, where his spirit flew,  
Left his little gran'child, such a pretty lass;  
Ben's a-goin' to take her; that'll make him eight—  
God sure'll bless him for his kindly thought.  
Hitch up and roll again. Hit's getting late  
And this old defile ain't no place to be caught;  
No time for sorrowing, tear-eyed and pale—  
Got to keep a-movin' on the Oregon Trail.

Can't see the wagon-tracks; trail's pinched out;  
Nothing but the snow peaks and shale-rock slopes,  
Outspan the bull-teams; we'll heave them wagons  
Upside and over with the rawhide ropes—  
Let's buck the mountains! Let's whip the snow crusts!  
Pounding through the chill wind, shirts sweat-black . . .  
Gee! But I wish I was back in Liberty!  
Pull, there, you quitter! for y'u can't turn back—  
Top of the mountains now, keen in the starlight,  
Sunup's a-comin' in the western sea,  
Yellow beams of glory-glow, floodin' the snow peaks—  
There lies Oregon! Glory to Thee!

Punch up the bull teams, tune up the banjo,  
Hallelujah! Praise God, kneeling in the snow,  
Land of the dripping fir, land of the homestead,  
Oregon! Oregon! Beckoning below—  
All out for Liberty, out across the ranges,  
Two-stepping, single-footing, hard-boiled and glory-singing,  
Whips cracking, oaths snapping, bull teams charging on,  
Babes a-borning, me a-dying, trail shouts ringing—  
Here come the conquerors (and there lie the frail)  
Roaring to the sunset on the Oregon Trail!

## ACROSS THE PLAINS

*W. T. RIGDON*

ACROSS THE wide plains with our slow moving trains  
We stirred up the dust like a gale;  
But with joke and with jest and our eyes to the west,  
We followed the Oregon trail.

These pioneer men from the plow and the pen,  
And the workshop with hammer and nail,  
The singer with odes and the lawyer with codes,  
All mingle alike on the trail.

The country school teacher, the old village preacher,  
The scholar from Harvard or Yale,  
All suffered alike on that memorable hike  
On the rocks and the bumps of the trail.

EXODUS FOR OREGON

*JOAQUIN MILLER*

A TALE half told and hardly understood;  
The talk of bearded men that chanced to meet,  
That lean'd on long quaint rifles in the wood,  
That look'd in fellow faces, spoke discreet  
And low, as half in doubt and in defeat  
Of hope; a tale it was of lands of gold  
That lay toward the sun. Wild wing'd and fleet  
It spread among the swift Missouri's bold  
Unbridled men, and reach'd to where Ohio roll'd.

The long chain'd lines of yoked and patient steers,  
The long white trains that pointed to the west,  
Beyond the savage west; the hopes and fears  
Of blunt untutor'd men, who hardly guess'd  
Their course; the brave and silent women, dress'd  
In homely spun attire, the boys in bands,  
The cheery babes that laugh'd at all, and bless'd  
The doubting hearts with laughing lifted hands,  
Proclaim'd an exodus for far untraversed lands.

The Plains! The shouting drivers at the wheel;  
The crash of leather whips; the crush and roll  
Of wheels; the groan of yokes and grinding steel  
And iron chain, and lo! at last the whole  
Vast line, that reach'd as if to touch the goal,  
Began to stretch and stream away and wind

Toward the west, as if with one control;  
Then hope loom'd fair, and home lay far behind:  
Before, the boundless plain, and fiercest of their kind.

The way lay wide and green and fresh as seas  
And far away as any reach of wave;  
The sunny streams went by in belt of trees;  
And here and there the tassell'd, tawny brave  
Swept by on horse, looked back, stretched forth and gave  
A yell of hell, and then did wheel and rein  
Awhile, and point away, dark-brown'd and grave,  
Into the far and dim and distant plain  
With signs and prophecies, and then plunged on again.

Some hills at last began to lift and break;  
Some streams began to fail of wood and tide.  
The sombre plain began betime to take  
A hue of weary brown, and wild and wide  
It stretch'd its naked breast on every side . . .  
A babe was heard at last to cry for bread  
Amid the deserts; cattle low'd and died,  
And dying man went by with broken tread,  
And left a long black serpent line of wreck and dead.

Strange hunger'd birds, black-wing'd and still as death,  
And crown'd of red with hooked beaks, blew low  
And close about, till we could touch their breath—  
Strange unnamed birds, that seem'd to come and go  
In circles now, and now direct and slow,

Continual, yet never touch the earth;  
Slim foxes shied and shuttled to and fro  
At times across the dusty weary dearth  
Of life, looked back, then sank like crickets in a hearth.

The dust arose, a long dim line like smoke  
From out a riven earth. The wheels went by,  
The thousand feet in harness and in yoke,  
They tore the ways of ashen alkali,  
And desert winds blew sudden, swift and dry.  
The dust! it sat upon and fill'd the train!  
It seem'd to fret and fill the very sky.  
Lo! dust upon the beasts, the tent, the plain,  
And dust, alas! on breasts that rose not up again.

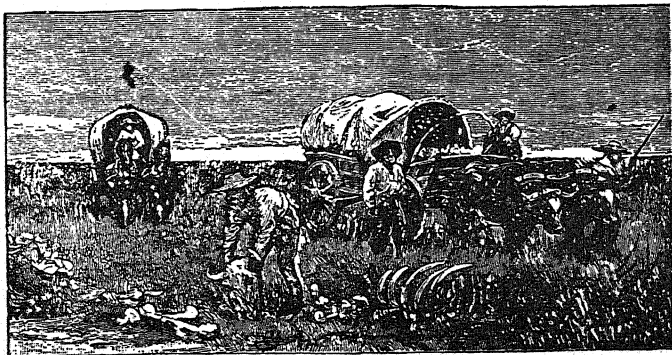
They sat in desolation and in dust  
By dried-up desert streams; the mother's hands  
Hid all her bended face; the cattle thrust  
Their tongues and faintly call'd across the lands,  
The babes, that knew not what this way through sands  
Could mean, did ask if it would end to-day . . .  
The panting wolves slid by, red-eyed, in bands  
To streams beyond. The men look'd far away,  
And silent saw that all a boundless desert lay.

They rose by night; they struggled on and on  
As thin and still as ghosts; then here and there  
Beside the dusty way before the dawn,  
Men silent laid them down in their despair,



And died. But woman! Woman, frail as fair!  
May man have strength to give to you your due;  
You falter'd not, nor murmur'd anywhere,  
You held your babes, held to your course, and you  
Bore on through burning hell your double burthens through.

They stood at last, the decimated few,  
Above a land of running streams, and they . . . ?  
They push'd aside the boughs, and peering through  
Beheld afar the cool, refreshing bay;  
Then some did curse, and some bend hands to pray;  
But some look'd back upon the desert, wide  
And desolate with death, then all the day  
They wept. But one, with nothing left beside  
His dog to love, crept down among the ferns and died.



THE WAGON IN FRONT

FLORENCE KNIGHT NITSCHKE

*[It was decided that one-fourth of the members of the Bethel Colony, Missouri, should leave on May 19, 1855, to establish homes in Aurora, Oregon. It was a much-coveted honor to drive the lead team. Though after days of persuasion, Billy Keil had been granted a reluctant consent to his pleas, his happiness was short lived. The day before their departure, the lad died of malaria.*

*Rather than break his promise to the boy, Dr. William Kiel, the colony leader, had a plains hearse made from a light wagon. On it was placed a coffin lined with lead and this receptacle for the body filled with alcohol.*

*From Dr. Keil's decision that he must keep his promise to his dead son, arises the unusual story of a hearse leading a wagon train across the plains, as told in the following poem:]*

IN BETHEL the anvils were ringing "Farewell"  
to a marching song,

Good-by to old friends and a blessing, as the  
wagon wheels roll along.

Each farmhouse, grist mill and boot shop, hummed  
busily through the day,

And the streets, with their stir and bustle,  
echoed the anvil's lay.

Of all those who laughed and chanted, as gay as a  
young sunbeam,

The gayest and gladdest was Billy, who was to  
drive the leading team.

But the night before their departure, he became  
fatally ill,

And Bethel was bowed in mourning, and the anvil's  
song was still.

A council was called by the elders, and there the good  
men agreed

That Billy should ride with his people, and he and  
his wagon should lead.

So, sadly, with some of them weeping, they met at  
the break of day,

To assemble their long white column, and quietly  
march away.

The flag on the green in the village dipped in a  
solemn salute

To the leading, black-draped wagon, but the  
anvils still were mute.

Off on the trail of the pioneers, to the land by  
the sundown sea—

Off to the homes of their long desire, where men  
and their dreams are free.

And their days were filled with the wonders of an  
ever-changing land,

Of prairies, waist deep with wild flowers, and a  
shaggy bison band.

They learned to know the ways of the land. How a wagon wheel is blocked—

A river forded and sheer cliffs scaled, and a thinning larder stocked,

Paused for rest on a rising knoll, where the sky and prairie met,

The caravan with its round white tops, made a lovely silhouette.

Circled for camp on the old South Platte, a party of warring Sioux,

Came thundering down like painted death, flaunting the rainbow hues.

But the white men gave the trail salute—palm raised in peace to a foe—

And softly they sang a mournful hymn of a Cross borne long ago.

More slowly the puzzled braves came on, but nearing the funeral bier,

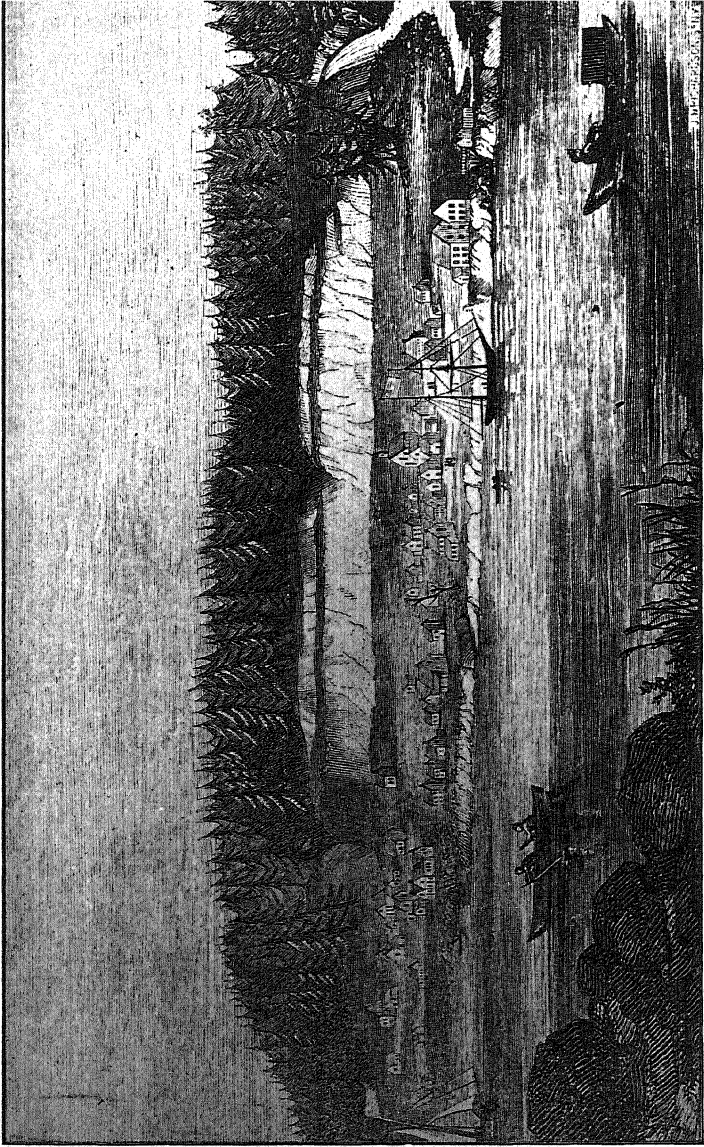
Terror shook them like autumn leaves, and they wheeled away in fear.

By signal smoke in the redmen's code, the news was flashed ahead—

Of chants to their dead in the funeral train, and the young white spirit who lead.

A taboo was lain from Chimney Rock, to Willamette's far off shore,

And the caravan was held in awe, for the sake of the boy it bore.



*Courtesy Oregon Historical Society*

## OREGON CITY, COVERED WAGON TERMINUS

THE PIONEER OX

*SAM L. SIMPSON*

It is time that a treacherous wrong should be righted,  
And honor returned to a friend we have slighted  
In the songs that are sung and the tales that are told;  
The mirage of the plains looms up as I ponder,  
And away, far away, over Laramie yonder,  
Is a picture of something familiar of old.

It's the emigrant train, with wagon and wagon,  
Gray-tented, a slow and mysterious dragon  
To the Sioux and Shawnee, as they circle afar  
On their sable-maned coursers, and muttered and wondered  
If the lands of their people were thus to be sundered  
By a mystery following the sun and star!

The eyes of the women are faded and weary,  
The cries of the children are lonesome and dreary;  
And the men, with set lips, stalk on by their teams  
As the endless white road goes winding and winding  
Through wastes that are songless, with dust that is blinding,  
To Oregon, golden with argonaut dreams.

And yet, all the while, the oxen that bore them,  
So sluggish, yet sure, to the dreamland before them,  
Are bowing scarred necks to the pitiless yoke—  
So awkward and grim, so huge and ungainly,

And yet with a strength that was never called vainly—  
Who yet for these oxen a fitting word spoke?

When loosened at night, gaunt-flanked and deep-chested  
They lay on the plain and moaned as they rested,  
All thankful for shadows on sad, purple eyes;  
With never a dream or delusion to cheer them,  
And only the wolf-haunted silence to hear them,  
They moaned as they slept under gold-flowered skies.

And so, day by day, with horizons slow-lifting  
Like mists that were clearing, like hopes that were drifting,  
They gave all their might to the yokes and the chains;  
With hunger and thirst and the driver's keen scourging  
(As if duty embodied should need such harsh urging!)  
They bore the state-builders o'er mountains and plains.

And lo, when the rugged Cascades were descended,  
They hauled the great logs for the homes they defended  
Who founded this emerald empire of ours;  
And, glad of the greenness of nature surrounding,  
Of a region with rivers and forests abounding,  
They drew the first plows through wild tangles of flowers.

\* \* \*

*We fully tested the ox and mule teams, and we found the  
ox teams greatly superior.*

—PETER H. BURNETT,  
CAPTAIN OF 1843 WAGON TRAIN.

ROAD TO OREGON

MRS. ELIZABETH MARKHAM

[The author, who crossed the plains in 1847, was the mother of the famous poet Edwin Markham. The poem was printed in the *Oregon Spectator*, January 9, 1851.]

To THE Pacific's temperate clime  
Our journey soon began—  
Traversing through the desert sands  
Towards the setting sun.  
And herds of buffalo appear—  
On either side they stand;  
Far as our telescope could reach,  
One thick and clustering band.

On Platte the rocks like battlements,  
Were towering tall and high;  
The frightened elk and antelope  
Before our trains would fly.  
Our toils are done, our perils o'er—  
The weary pilgrims' band  
Have reached Columbia's fertile shore—  
That far-famed happy land.





THE CROSSING

*JOHN C. ALMACK*

WE CAME to the crossing at mid-afternoon . . .  
Marked by the graves of human dead,  
And bleaching bones of cattle lay the trail.

We were behind the rest; an irised stream  
Ran fitfully its yellow pathway down.  
I saw the wheel-marks pointing the ford  
And drove the oxen in.  
The water whirled until I reeled,  
Pushing downstream, urging the plodding beasts.

Dazed by the heavy-labored hours, by watchful nights,  
The low heat-lightning in the ominous west,  
I drove the wagon off the ledge:—  
My wife sat watching from the covered seat,  
The baby in her arms. I saw her look  
Of terror as the water swept her down;  
She blamed me in her death because I took my eyes  
An instant from the farther shore.

I did not seek the evening camp  
Where my companions lodged,  
But turned the oxen loose,  
And took the trail to Puget Sound.

THROUGH NACHES PASS

*CORNELIUS ROGERS*

THROUGH Naches Pass  
In the high Cascades  
The wagons toiled  
Up heavy grades.

In Fifty-Three  
The emigrants found  
This shorter route  
To Puget Sound.

They ended the climb  
And started downhill,  
And then—the lead oxen,  
They stood stock still.

The lash leapt out  
Like a pistol shot  
On flanks of the leaders,  
Who obeyed it not.

To the yoked heads  
The driver went,  
And looked down  
A straight descent.

He called out:  
"Come look at this!  
I guess", he said,  
"Trail's end it is."

Then said the captain,  
Lean and brown:  
"With rope we'll let  
The wagons down."

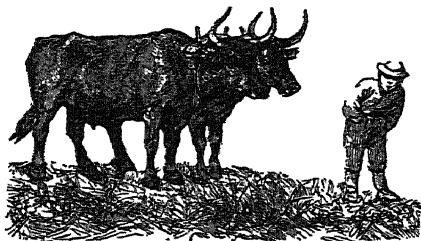


Yet their supply  
Was but half enough  
To get them down  
That sheer, high bluff.

The captain called:  
"Bring rope, more rope!"  
They said: "Here's all",  
Like the end of hope.

The captain said:  
"We'll use rawhide",  
And laid his hand  
On a shaggy side.

So the wagon-train  
Of Fifty-three—  
Less oxen four—  
Reached Puget Sea.

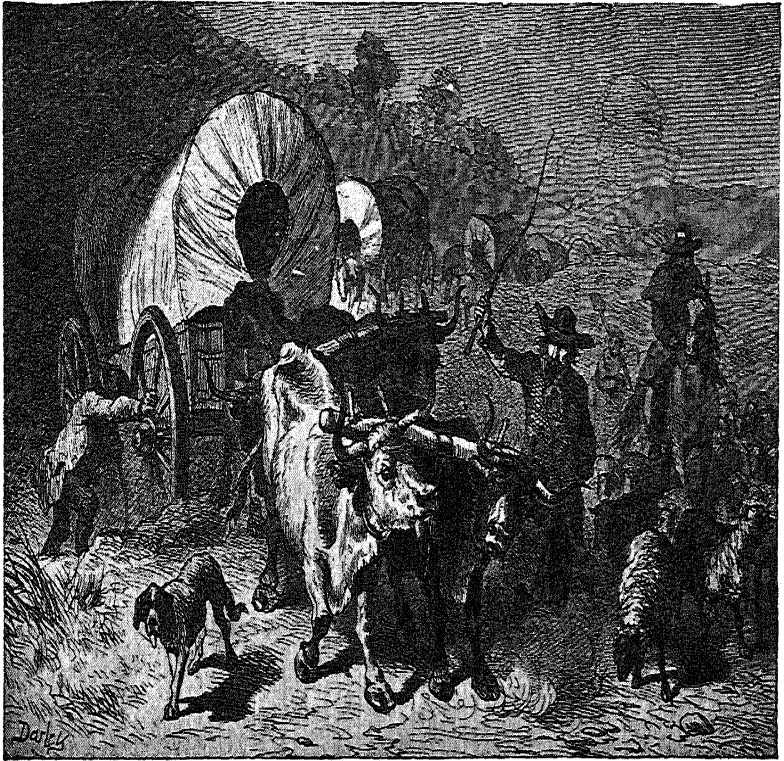


# 5

THE MORMON TRAIL

*They shook the depth of the desert gloom  
With their hymns of lofty cheer.*

FELICIA DOROTHEA HEMANS



## THE MORMON TRAIL

“The songs of Zion resounded from wagon to wagon, reverberating through the woods.”

**I**N THE SPRING of 1847 the pioneer band began the long journey westward in search of a site for their new Zion. . . . along the north branch of the Platte. . . . by way of Fort Laramie.

The Mormons arrived at South Pass in the latter part of June. . . . thence skirting the Colorado desert and reaching the Green River country. They reached Fort Bridger. . . . crossed the rugged spurs of the Uintah range, and arrived at Echo Canyon. Brigham directed Orson Pratt to take. . . . forty-two men. . . . twenty-three wagons—and cut through the mountains into the valley.

Brigham was slowly following with the remainder of the company, and was still so weak as to be obliged to be carried on a bed in Wilford Wordruff's carriage. As they reached where the view was unbroken. . . . Brigham rose from his bed and surveyed the country and said: "It is enough. This is the right place. Drive on."

ONE OF THE two divisions of the Mormon emigration of 1848 consisted of 1,229 persons, with 397 wagons, 74 horses, 91 mules, 1,275 oxen, 699 cows, 184 loose cattle, 411 sheep, 140 pigs, 605 chickens, 37 cats, 82 dogs, 3 goats, 10 geese, 2 hives of bees, 8 doves, and 1 crow.

—HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT



## THE HANDCART EXPEDITION

*[In 1856 one of the strangest expeditions in American history left Iowa City. It was composed of Mormon converts who had just arrived from Europe.]*

*The cost of providing oxen and wagons was too great for the church, and Brigham Young, prompted by the Scripture "Let them come on foot, with hand-carts . . ." decided to send them on foot. The church officials figured 15 miles a day would be enough at first, but expected them to travel 30 miles when they grew accustomed to it.*

*Thus some 1300 converts, divided into five groups, began the journey, one group at a time. The first group arrived successfully at Salt Lake City; the rest had a harder time, starting later in the year.*

*Seventeen pounds of baggage was allowed each person, including food, clothing, bedding. An ox-drawn wagon was provided for every 100 persons, which carried tents and provisions. The hand-carts had to travel over unbroken ground, and weighed 100 pounds when loaded!*

*They had to use precious grease for their cart-wheels and food became scarcer. As they climbed the mountains, they encountered snow. They were finally met by a relief train, which had taken its time, not realizing the converts were starving.*

*They reached Salt Lake City four months after leaving Iowa City. Sixty-seven of the fourth company died, and of the fifth*

*company, one-quarter perished. The following was one of their favorite songs, sung to the tune of "A Little More Cider":]*

OH, our faith goes with the hand-carts,  
And they have our hearts' best love;  
'Tis a novel mode of traveling,  
*Devised by the Gods above.*

Chorus:

Hurrah for the Camp of Israel!  
Hurrah for the hand-cart scheme!  
Hurrah! Hurrah! 'tis better far  
Than the wagon and ox-team.

*And Brigham's their executive,*  
He told us the design;  
And the Saints are proudly marching on,  
Along the hand-cart line.

Who cares to go with the wagons?  
Not we who are free and strong;  
Our faith and arms, with right good will,  
Shall pull our carts along.

\* \* \*

*We're going to Zion with our carts  
And the spirit of God within our hearts.*

WEST OF CASPER, WYOMING

ALAN SWALLOW

THE Mormons knew that Zion never thirsted  
And turned their faces to a warmer West.  
Jim Bridger, too, found nothing here he wanted—  
No traders, pelts, no lingering place of rest.

Here many wheels have turned, and here they parted.  
Some took the Mormon Trail to Utah, some rolled on  
Over the Pass to water. Always men  
Have shunned bare land in search of Oregon.

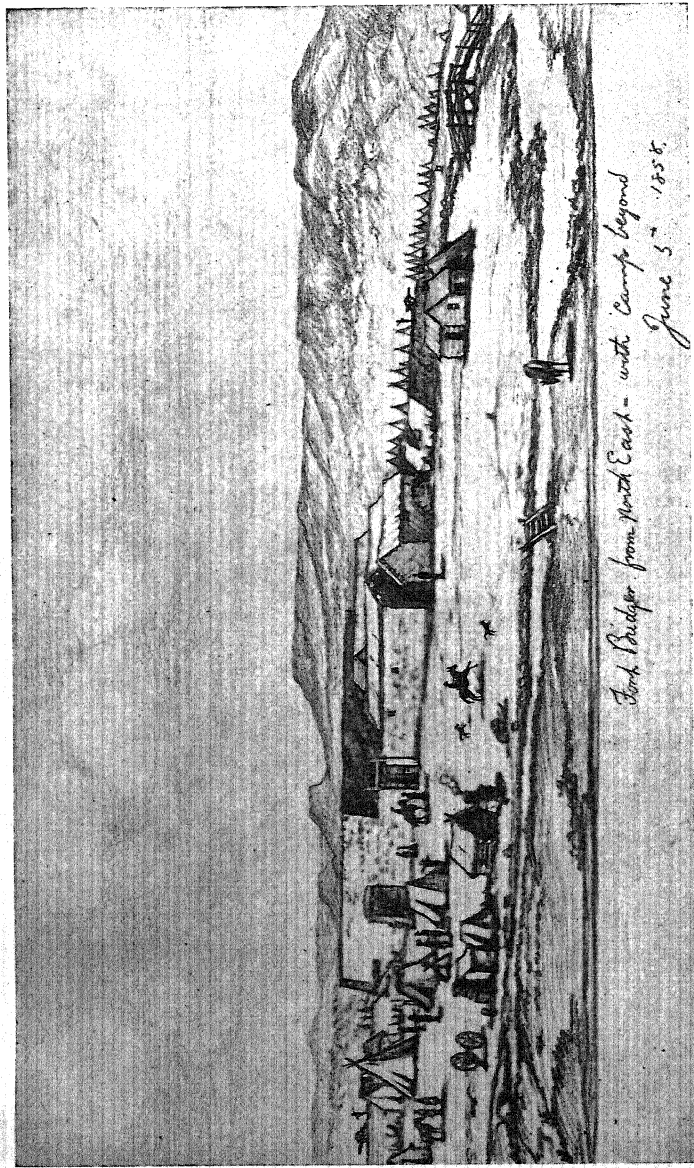
Not all have shunned, however. There a shack  
Marks one man's life with eyes that show his pain.  
And here I see an iron-shod wagon  
Rust-coated in the wear of sun and rain.

O God, I wish I knew what held these men  
Or what their lives on sterile land begot.  
I only know that even God Himself  
Would turn away, but I cannot.

\* \* \*

*The Mormons, in the scarcity of wool for their hand looms,  
"collected the hair of the buffalo from the sage brush as they  
traveled."*

—Mrs. J. Horne



Fort Bridger from North East - with Camp beyond  
June 5<sup>th</sup> 1858.

UPPER CALIFORNIA, O!

JOHN TAYLOR

*[John Taylor was the third president of the Mormon church. While a missionary in Europe, he translated the Book of Mormon into the French language and directed its translation into German.]*

The Upper California, O, that's the land for me!  
It lies between the mountains and the great Pacific sea;  
    The Saints can be supported there,  
    And taste the sweets of liberty  
In Upper California—Oh, that's the land for me.

We'll go and lift our standard, we'll go there and be free;  
We'll go to California and have our jubilee,  
    A land that blooms with beauty rare,  
    A land of life and liberty,  
With flocks and herds abounding—Oh, that's the land for me!

We'll burst off all our fetters and break the Gentile yoke.  
For long it has beset us, but now it shall be broke  
    No more shall Jacob bow his neck;  
    Henceforth he shall be great and free  
In Upper California—Oh, that's the land for me!

EXPLORING

THALES H. HASKELL

*[Written in 1865 in a total of sixty-four lines and often sung among the pioneers.]*

We bid farewell to Gould's place  
Exploring we were bound  
Instead of taking a straight course  
We circle round and round  
The rocks they are so high  
The hills they are so steep  
We can hardly find a level place  
To lie us down to sleep.

We've clambered up the clay hills  
The compass we have boxed  
We have traveled over mountains  
And canyons full of rocks.

When we got to Cedar  
The Bishop took us in  
And gave us all our supper  
And bid us call again  
But when we got to Parowan  
The Bishop gave a bow  
And said it's not convenient  
To entertain you now.

# 6

THE FORTY-NINERS

*Gold! gold! gold! gold!*  
*Bright and yellow, hard and cold,*  
*Molten, graven, hammered and rolled;*  
*Heavy to get, and light to hold . . .*  
*Gold! gold! gold! gold!*  
*Good or bad a thousand-fold!*

THOMAS HOOD





## THE FORTY-NINERS

They traveled the California Trail, not to trade or plow, not to worship, but for gold.

**T**HESE FACTS TELL the story of how the natural course of the Pacific Coast's development was changed by the magic of gold. The long list of American explorers, traders and missionaries, whose deeds and sacrifices glorify the early history of the Pacific Northwest, were largely forgotten by a nation entranced with the story of the "Forty-Niners". The far-reaching influence of Oregon as the oldest American territory on the Pacific Coast faded quickly from the memories of men.

The Oregon Trail was already deep worn through the sand-hills along the Platte and Sweetwater, Bear River, and the Portneuf, by the wagons of the Oregon pioneers; it was lined with the crumbling bones of their cattle and marked by the graves of their dead; yet instantly, after the passage of the thronging multitudes of '49, it became the "California Trail," and to this day most men know it by no other name.

—JOSEPH SCHAFFER

WESTERN WAGONS

ROSEMARY AND STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

They went with axe and rifle, when the trail was still to blaze,  
They went with wife and children, in the prairie schooner days.  
With banjo and with frying pan—Susanna don't you cry!  
For I'm off to California to get rich out there or die!

We've broken land and cleared it, but we're tired of where  
we are.

They say that wild Nebraska is a better place by far.  
There's gold in far Wyoming, there's black earth in Ioway  
So pack up the kids and blankets, for we're moving out today.

The cowards never started and the weak died on the road,  
And all across the continent the endless campfires glowed.  
*We'd taken land and settled—but a traveler passed by—  
And we're going West tomorrow—Lordy, never ask us why!*

We're going West tomorrow, where the promises can't fail.  
O'er the hills in legions, boys, and crowd the dusty trail!  
We shall starve and freeze and suffer. We shall die and  
tame the lands.

But we're going West tomorrow, with our fortune in our hands.

\* \* \*

*It was Bancroft's estimate that some 42,000 persons completed the trip by the Platte route to California in 1849.*

—FREDERIC L. PAXSON

HO, FOR CALIFORNIA-O!

Ho, boys, ho! for California, O!  
There's plenty of gold, so I've been told,  
On the banks of the Sacramento.

Ho, boys, ho! for California, O!  
There's plenty of bones, so I've been told,  
On the banks of the Sacramento.

\* \* \*

*It was early in the spring of 1850 when Kit Carson, Jim Bridger and myself met at Bent's Fort on the headwaters of the Arkansas River. Carson said to Bridger "Now, Jim, I want you and Will, meaning me, to escort emigrants across to California this season, for the gold excitement back in the eastern states is something wonderful. I know you boys can get good wages out of this thing, and I want you to take hold of it. Now, Jim, will you go?" Bridger jumped up, rubbed his hands together, and said: "I'll be doggoned if I won't."*

—CAPTAIN W. F. DRANNAN,  
PILOT TO EMIGRANT TRAINS.

## PIKE COUNTY CHORUS

*JOHN PHOENIX*

Suddenly we hear approaching a train from Pike County, consisting of seven families, with forty-six wagons, each drawn by thirteen oxen; each family consists of a man in butternut-colored clothing driving the oxen; a wife in butternut-colored clothing riding in the wagon, holding a butternut baby, and seventeen butternut children running promiscuously about the establishment. . . Now rises o'er the plains in mellifluous accents, the grand Pike County Chorus.

OH we'll soon be thar  
In the land of gold,  
Through the forest old,  
O'er the mounting cold,  
With spirits bold—  
Oh, we come, we come,  
And we'll soon be thar.

Gee up Bolly! whoo, up, whoo haw!



FROM EARTH'S FOUR QUARTERS

M. V.

Low spreading oak and lofty pines,  
Shade the camps all o'er the mines;  
From earth's four quarters, young and old.  
In legions come in quest of gold.

Here are about three thousand men,  
And scarcely room for one in ten;  
They have a law for each man's claim,  
Which holds by tools or written name.

Each man makes his own survey,  
Ten steps wide or square each way—  
He steps so far at every stride,  
It makes his claim one-third too wide.

And some defy the lawful rules,  
And hold two claims by extra tools—  
And thus keep out many a poor man,  
By some old shovel, pick, or pan.

\* \* \*

*From Independence to the first settlement in California. . . . near the gold region, is about 2,050 miles. Oxen teams travel about 15 miles per day upon an average.*

—JOHN FROST

## MEN OF FORTY-NINE

*JOAQUIN MILLER*

Those brave old bricks of forty-nine!  
What lives they lived! what deaths they died!  
A thousand canyons, darkling wide  
Below Sierra's slopes of pine,  
Receive them now. And they who died  
Along the far, dim, desert route—  
Their ghosts are many . . . let their ashes sleep,  
Untouched by man, on plain or steep . . .

The wild man's yell, the groaning wheel;  
The train that moved like drifting barge;  
The dust that rose up like a cloud—  
Like smoke of distant battle. Loud  
The great whips rang like shot, and steel  
Of antique fashion, crude and large,  
Flashed back as in some battle charge . . .

Yea, I remember! The still tears  
That o'er uncoffined faces fell!  
The final, silent, sad farewell!

These are with me all the years!  
They shall be with me ever. I  
Shall not forget. I hold a trust.  
They are a part of my existence. When  
Swift down the shining iron track  
You sweep, and fields of corn flash back,  
And herds of lowing steers move by,  
And men laugh loud, in mute distrust,  
I turn to other days, to men  
Who made a pathway with their dust.





## FORTY-NINER IN THE DESERT

BENJ. F. TAYLOR

WE STRIKE the Great Desert  
With its wilderness howl,  
With its cactus and sage,  
With its serpent and owl,  
And its pools of dead water,  
Its torpid old streams,  
The corpse of an earth  
And the nightmare of dreams;  
And the dim rusty trail  
Of the old Forty-nine,  
That they wore as they went  
To the mountain and mine,  
With graves for their milestones;  
How slowly they crept  
Like the shade on a dial  
Where the sun never slept. . .

\* \* \*

. . . Bleaching bones  
Burned on our eyes: the white skull-faces grinned.  
*Thinking of dead men's dust on the desert wind,  
Slow we moved and silent.*

—VERNE BRIGHT

BEANS

*ROBERT PATTERSON*

I'll sing you a song of the olden time,  
Of the days of forty-nine,  
Of the golden dreams of the Argonauts  
And the bean-pod's fruitful vine.

Great States have grown by hardy toil,  
And some by other means;  
But who'll deny this golden land  
Owes all her joys to beans.

'Twas beans that braced the pioneer  
And gave him strength to climb;  
'Twas beans that brought a forlorn hope  
To the promised land on time.

So many have climbed the golden stair  
And laid them down to rest,  
That few are left to sing the praise  
Of the beans out in the West.

But many a tongue can tell the tale  
Of rocks and mountain streams,  
Crossed by weary ones who longed  
For camp and a plate of beans.

The miner worn by heat and toil,  
His "luck in the mines" bemeans (!)  
"Grub-stake me as you wish," he cries,  
"But don't forget the beans."

"There's plenty of dust in the hills," he'll say,  
As on his pick he leans,  
"There's lots of grub that sticks to the ribs,  
But nothing as good as beans."

Just get some "frijoles" and put them to stew,  
Of "chile colorado" a taste,  
Give them plenty of time whatever you do,  
Beans never do credit to haste.

To give a fine flavor, add a slice of "Old Ned;"  
"Old-timers" will know what it means;  
When you've eaten your fill your wonder will cease  
That I enthuse over the homely old beans.



YELLOW FEVER

[Written for the OREGON SPECTATOR, Oregon City, November 30, 1848. It was signed with the initials O.P.Q. and was sent to the paper from Yam Hill.]

“WHY do you labor here,” he cried,  
“For merely life and pleasure,  
Whilst just beyond that mountain grey  
Lies wealth beyond all measure!  
The road is plain, the way is smooth,  
’Tis neither rough nor thorny;  
Come leave this rugged vale and go  
With me to Californy!

There wealth untold is bought and sold!  
And each man be partaker!  
Where fifty tons of finest gold  
Are dug from every acre! !”  
At sound of gold, both young and old  
Forsook their occupation;  
And wild confusion seemed to rule  
In every situation.

An old cordwainer heard the news,  
And though not much elated,  
He left his pile of boots and shoes,  
And just evaporated!  
The cooper left his tubs and pails,  
His bucket and his piggins;

The sailor left his yards and sails,  
And started for the "diggins."

The farmer left his plow and steers,  
The merchant left his measure;  
The tailor drop't his goose and shears,  
And went to gather treasure.  
A pedagogue, attired incog,  
Gave ear to what was stated;  
Forsook his school, bestrode a mule,  
And then absquatulated!

A boatman, too, forsook his crew,  
Let fall his oar and paddle;  
And stole his neighbors iron-grey,  
But went without a saddle!  
The joiner drop'd his square and jack,  
The carpenter his chisel;  
The peddler laid aside his pack,  
And all prepared to mizzle!

The woodman drop'd his trusty axe,  
The tanner left his leather;  
The miller left his pile of sacks,  
And all went off together!  
The doctor cocked his eye askance,  
The promised wealth descreying;  
Then wheeled his horse, and off he pranc'd,  
And left his patients dying! !

WESTWARD

*VELMA CALDWELL MELVILLE*

"I'M GOING west," a mere lad boasted,  
Looking proudly at his friend,  
"Going west to make a fortune.  
You'll see me rich, sir, in the end."

"I'm going west," a young man whispered,  
Gazing down in eyes of blue,  
"Going west to seek a fortune,  
Then, my love, come back for you."

"I'm going west to try my fortune—"  
The speaker one in middle life—  
"Here I scarce can gain subsistence  
For my children and my wife."

"I'm going west to mend my fortune,"  
Sighed a man with hoary head,  
"The life's sands are well nigh numbered,  
And I'll soon sleep with the dead."

Westward, ho! they all are going,  
Restless youth and white haired sire,  
Rushing, ever, where the sunset  
Bathes the earth in liquid fire.

MY NEW YEAR'S GUESTS

R. M. DAGGETT

[*Scene: A chamber in Virginia City, one of the pictures on the wall being the reduced photographs of over five hundred California pioneers of 1849.—Time: Midnight, December 31, 1881.*]

As I sit alone in my chamber this last of the dying year,  
Dim shades of the past surround me and faint through the storm  
I hear

Of the bearded men and stalwart I greeted in forty-nine;  
The giants with hope audacious; the giants of iron limb;  
The giants who journey'd westward when the trails were new  
and dim;

The giants who felled the forests, made pathways o'er the snows,  
And planted the vine and fig-tree where the manzanita grows;

Who swept down the mountain gorges, and painted their endless  
night  
With their cabins rudely fashioned, and their camp-fire's ruddy  
light;

Who came like a flood of waters to a thirsty desert plain,  
And where there had been no reapers grew valley of golden  
grain.

Nor wonder that through the darkness should enter a spectral  
throng,

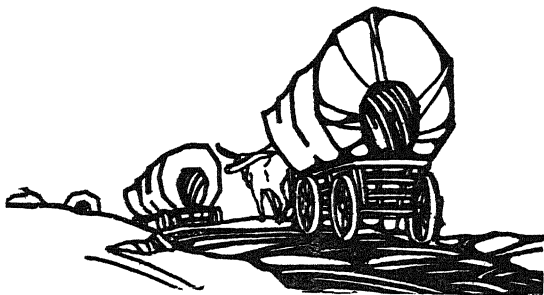
And gather around my table with the old-time smile and song;  
For there on the wall before me, in a frame of gilt and brown,  
With a chain of years suspended, old faces are looking down;  
Five hundred all grouped together—five hundred old pioneers—  
Now list as I raise the taper and trace the step of the years.

To this one the fates were cruel; but he bore his burden well,  
And the willows bend in sorrow by the wayside where he fell.  
Now closer the light on this face; 'twas wrinkled when we were  
young;

His torch drew our footsteps westward; his name is on every  
tongue.

The shadowy lips are moving as if they would ope and speak;  
And I seem to hear low whispers, and catch the echo of strains  
That rose from the golden gulches and followed the moving  
trains.

The scent of the sage and desert, the path o'er the rocky hight,  
The shallow graves by the roadside—all, all have come back  
tonight.

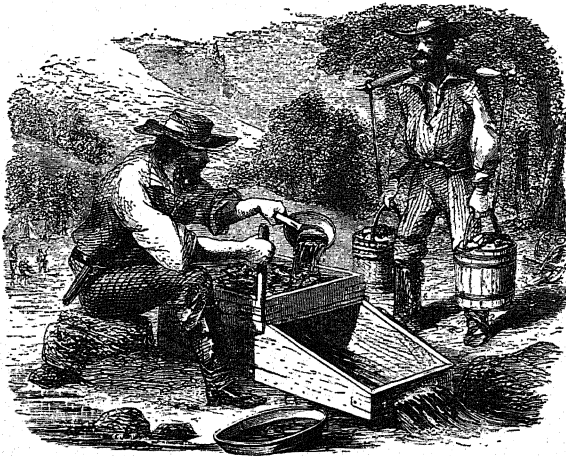




## BALLAD OF THE FORTY-NINER

OH, DON'T you remember Sweet Betsy from Pike,  
Who crossed the big mountains with her lover Ike—  
With two yoke of cattle, a large yellow dog,  
A tall shanghai rooster and one spotted hog.

Their wagon broke down with a terrible crash,  
And out on the prairie rolled all kinds of trash;  
The shanghai ran off, and their cattle all died;  
That morning the last piece of bacon was fried;  
Poor Ike was discouraged, and Betsy got mad,  
The dog dropped his tail and looked wondrously sad.



SAN FRANCISCO - 1853

CITY full of people  
In a business flurry;  
Everybody's motto,  
Hurry! hurry! hurry! . . .

Englishmen and French,  
German, Dutch and Danish,  
Chattering Chinese,  
Portugese and Spanish:  
Men of every nation,  
Birds of every feather,  
Honest men and rogues  
Hustled up together . . .

Miners in red shirts  
Shooting home like rockets,  
Bags of yellow "dust"  
Lining ragged pockets.  
City of the West  
Built up in a minute,  
Hurry and excitement  
Moving all within it . . .

\* \* \*

*The discovery of gold laid the foundation  
of San Francisco's greatness.*

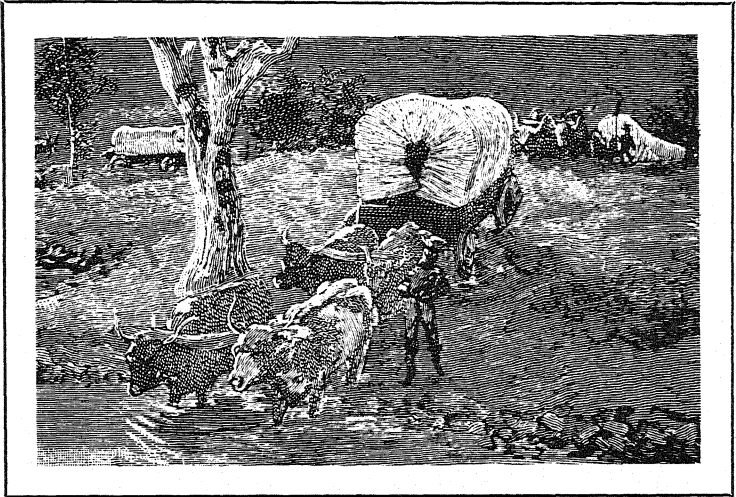
—JOHN S. HITTELL



PLAINS AND DESERTS

*The desert circle spreads,  
Like the round ocean girdled with the sky.*

ROBERT SOUTHEY



## **PLAINS AND DESERTS**

“On and on we journeyed . . . fifteen miles a day over cactus, sage brush, hot sand.”

**F**ROM INDEPENDENCE to Fort Laramie is a vast plain entirely destitute of timber, with the exceptions of the small portions occasionally found upon and in the immediate vicinity of the streams.

—LANSFORD W. HASTINGS,  
CAPTAIN OF THE 1842 WAGON TRAIN.

THE OREGON TRAIL . . . was now a broad road, ankle deep in stifling alkali dust over the "Great American Desert," and a narrow crooked ribbon rutted to the hub in the tortuous mountain passes.

—SHEBA HARGREAVES

SEVERAL TIMES I passed through villages of prairie-dogs, who sat, each at the mouth of his burrow, holding his paws before him in a supplicating attitude, and yelping away most vehemently, whisking his little tail with every squeaking cry he uttered.

—FRANCIS PARKMAN: "THE OREGON TRAIL."

AFTER CROSSING the streams, we would travel day after day, no timber in sight, only emigrant wagons one after another as far as our eyes could reach over a level plain.

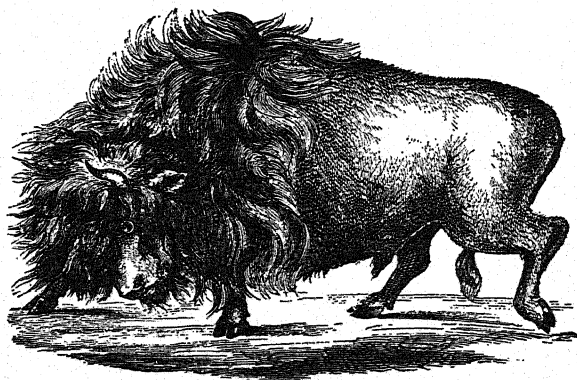
—MRS. M. A. LOONEY, PIONEER OF 1853.

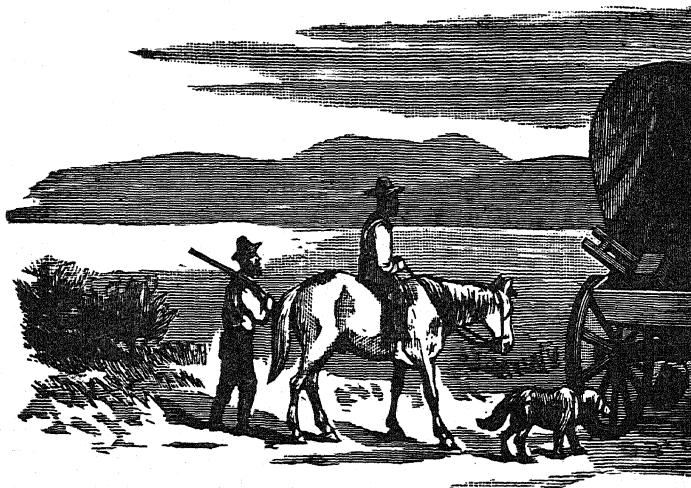
## BUFFALOES

*VACHEL LINDSAY*

BUFFALOES, buffaloes, thousands abreast,  
A scourge and amazement, they swept to the west.  
With black bobbing noses, with red rolling tongues,  
Coughing forth steam from their leather-wrapped lungs,  
Cows with their calves, bulls big and vain,  
Goring the laggards, shaking the mane,  
Stamping flint feet, flashing moon eyes.

Pompous and owlish, shaggy and wise.  
Like sea-cliffs and caves resounded their ranks,  
With shoulders like waves, and undulant flanks . . .



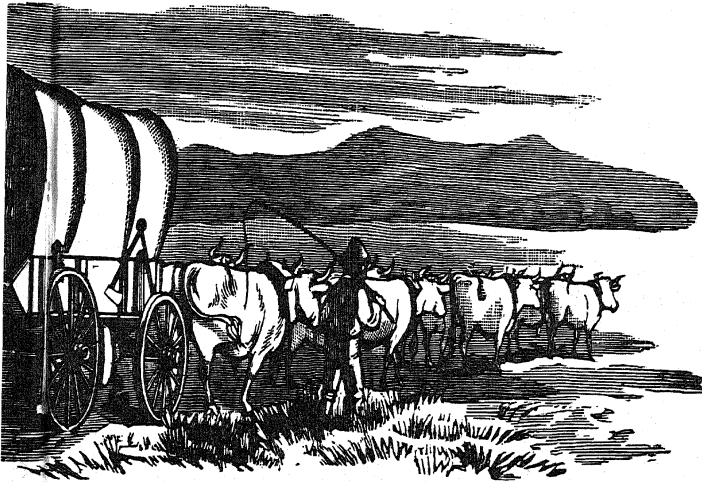


THE WAGON TRAIN

*SAM L. SIMPSON*

FORWARD! THE crackling lashes send  
A thrill of action down the train,  
Their brawny necks the oxen bend  
With creaking yoke and clanking chain;  
The horsemen gallop down the line,  
And swerve around the lowing kine  
That straggle loosely on the plain. . .





And now the sun is dropping down,  
The light and shadows, red and brown,

Are weaving sunset's purple spell:  
The teams are freed, the fires are made,  
Like scarlet night-flow'rs in the shade,  
And pleasant groups before, between,  
Are thronging in the fitful sheen—

The day is done and all is well. . .

A hundred nights, a hundred days;  
Nor folded cloud nor silken haze

Mellow the sun's midsummer blaze.  
    Along the brown and barren plain  
    In silence drags the wasted train;

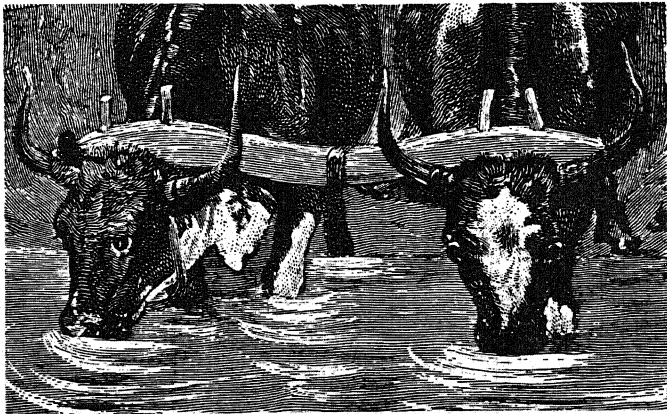
The dust starts up beneath your tread,  
Like angry ashes of the dead,  
    To blind you with a choking cloud  
    And wrap you in a yellow shroud. . .

Alas, it is a lonesome land  
Of bitter sage and barren sand,  
    Under a bitter, barren sky  
That never heard the robin sing,  
Nor kissed the lark's exultant wing,  
    Nor breathed the rose's fragrant sigh!

A weary land—alas! alas!  
The shadows of the vultures pass—  
    A spectral sign across your path;  
The gaunt, gray wolf, with head askance,  
Throws back at you a scowling glance  
    Of cringing hate and coward wrath,  
And like a wraith accursed and banned  
Fades out before your lifted hand.

A dim, sad land, forgot, forsworn,  
By all bright life that may not mourn,  
    And crazed with glistening ghost of seas. . .  
Only to taunt the thirst and fly  
From withered lip and lurid eye . . .

The sun is weary overhead,  
And pallid deserts round you spread  
A sorrowful eternity. . .  
And so the dust and grit and stain  
Of travel wears into the grain,  
And so the hearts and souls of men  
Were darkly tried and tested then,  
So that in happy after years,  
When rainbows gild remembered tears,  
Should any friend enquire of you  
If such or such an one you knew—  
I hear the answer, terse and grim,  
“Ah, yes, I crossed the plains with him!”



NEBRASKA

THE FOOTHILLS of the Rockies lie  
Afar athwart her western sky:  
Her rolling prairie, like the sea,  
Held long in virgin sanctity,  
Her fertile loam.  
Her wild-life roamed o'er treeless plains,  
Till came the toiling wagon-trains,—  
And settlers bold, far western bound,  
In broad Nebraska's valley found  
Their chosen home.

NEVADA

*FRANCES FULLER VICTOR*

NEVADA, desert, waste,  
Mighty, and inhospitable, and stern;  
Hiding a meaning over which we yearn  
In eager, panting haste . . .

I sit beneath thy stars,  
The shallop moon beached on a bank of clouds,  
And see thy mountains wrapped in shadowy shrouds,  
Glad that the darkness bars

The day's suggestion—  
The endless repetition of one question:  
Glad that thy stony face I cannot see,  
Nevada—Mystery!

THIRSTY OX-TEAMS

MRS. S. WATSON HAMILTON

THE LOAD that was a plaything at the first  
A burden grew that galled the toiling beast;  
And deserts here were met, and torturing thirst  
The measure of their suffering increased.

Long nights of travel on the sage brush plain  
To save his stock the traveler must endure,  
For night would mitigate the creature's pain,  
That draughts of cooling dew could then secure.

We crossing deserts left our camping ground  
After the heat of noon, and traveled late;  
But forward ere the day was marching found,  
And stopped ere noon to void the parching heat.

*To suffer with their thirst the stock begin;  
They leave the grass untouched, and cannot rest;  
The day grows, we must be marching on,  
And for the end are bade to travel fast.*

The tortured cattle need no urging now,  
For prompted by their thirst, they travel free,  
And drivers to the front were bade to go  
And check their speed which would too rapid be.

They smell the distant water in the air  
And straight to it instinctively are led;  
And drivers to control must meet them there,  
And for this purpose now were sent ahead. . .

The midnight passed before the stream was reached,  
At which the thirsty kine must be restrained,  
Their mouths were open, and their tongues were parched,  
And crazed with thirst, for safety must be chained.

*The lowing cattle and the shouting men  
That broke the silence of the desert night  
Are sounds one would not wish to hear again  
But no description can convey them right.*

### SULTRY TRAVEL

JAMES OPPENHEIM

DAYLONG the red and rolling prairies stretch  
Under the cruel circle of the sky.

Up from the East the swollen copper sun  
Lifts through a copper smoke, and the burnt air  
Palpitates, and up and over the hillocks  
The long white line of our schooner-wagons  
That creeps like a worm from one huge sky-cocoon  
Into another.

SAGEBRUSH

BERT HUFFMAN

WINDS OF the Western Desert,  
Freighted with hints of Spring—  
Stirring the blooms of the scented sage,  
Sweet is the breath you bring! . . .  
Clinging to rock and chasm;  
Loving the sterile plain;  
Crushed and trampled and hated,  
Still do you bloom again!

Somber and vast, your stretches  
Baffled the pioneers—  
Awed by your tragic menace,  
They moistened your wild with tears!  
Worlds of wilderness everywhere,  
Level and dun and wide—  
Wide as the horizon's verges,  
Pathless on every side!

\* \* \*

*There was one wedding in our train. . . . as we descended the western slope of the Rockies. I remember how, as they stood in front of their tent by a small fire, my father came up with an armful of sage brush and threw it on the fire. Instantly the whole scene was lighted.*

—MRS. NANCY JACOBS, PIONEER OF 1845.

TUMBLE WEEDS

DELL GRONNERT

ACROSS the desert's dusty face  
As wheels from broken carts  
Propelled by gusty winds  
The tumble weed a journey starts.  
And racing here and there  
In a broken uneven course  
It brushed the dry and browning bones  
Of an old and straying horse.

It caught in jagged desert teeth  
Like old men's broken snags  
And left a broken body string  
About their decaying crags.

It brushed the lip of a poison pool  
In its brief uncertain march  
And paused to rest a dusty wheel  
To alay a desert's parch.  
It lay upon a trailing moss  
A great green desert snake  
And the wind passed by, a desert's sigh,  
To still a bosom ache.

\* \* \*

*They rolled and tumbled, on and on and on;  
they built their aimless barriers, row on row.*

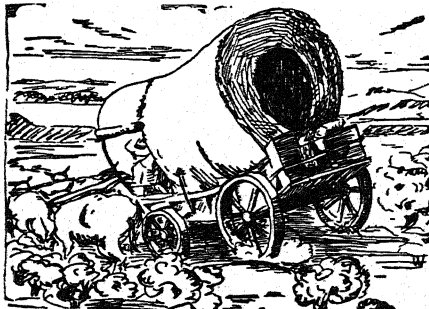
—GERTRUDE E. SMITH



## THE ARID LANDS

*HERBERT BASHFORD*

THESE lands are clothed in burning weather,  
These parched lands pant for God's cool rain;  
I look away where strike together  
The burnished sky and barren plain.  
I look away; no green thing gladdens  
My weary eye—no flower, no tree,  
Naught save the earth, the sage-brush saddens  
The scorched, gray earth that sickens me.  
Oh, for the pines, where the sweet wind revels!  
The ringing laugh of the crystal creek!  
Alas, gaunt Hunger haunts these levels,  
And Thirst goes wandering wan and weak.  
No shadow falls where swiftly passes  
The gray coyote's noiseless feet,  
No song of bird, no hint of grasses—  
The home of Silence and of Heat!



NEBRASKA CITY — FORT KEARNEY TRAIL 1858-1870

*A. E. S.*

AT THE Old River End of the Overland Road,  
Where the mountains slope down to the shore  
Was the town where the traveler came back to load  
And dreamed his worst trials were o'er.

For in crossing the plains there were perils and pains—  
Red raiders then rode in the West;—  
By the Big Muddy banks one could halt and break ranks  
Secure there in safety to rest;—

Wheel the wagons about—turn the red cattle out,—  
Let the bullwhacker lay down his goad . . .  
At the end of the Overland Road.

BABIES OF THE PIONEERS

*EUNICE W. LUCKEY*

TIRED CATTLE stumbled on the dusty trail,  
Men's hearts grew faint and women's cheeks turned pale.  
But some there were who knew no cares nor fears—  
The laughing babies of the pioneers.

## THE OLD RIFLE

*BEN HUR LAMPMAN*

BRING back the splendid forties and lift me  
out of the dust;

My lock is dry with decades and my throat  
is parched with rust.

I grieve for the bawling oxen and the lure of  
old, old trails—

They have shod the way with iron and run  
their beasts on rails.

Bring me the golden forties, the lode of the  
westering sun,

When I was bright from the smithy—borne  
by a man . . . his gun!

Flame fled from this muzzle when we woke to  
the night attack;

The Sioux braves lanced our leader ere the  
bullets beat them back.

Nestled against the stubble of my man's tense  
jaw, I spat

Death at a raiding blackfoot thief one dawn  
on Prairie Flat.

And I have ridden the saddle far into the  
charging van,  
    When wild from our wheeling horsemen the  
    driven buffalo ran.  
I coughed my ball to its billet, as out of the  
log stockade  
    My man sped on the sorrel mare—to call the  
    swords to aid.  
Bring me the fighting forties—and have your way  
with me then;  
    For I was a plainsman's rifle and took the  
    trail with men!



Bring back the splendid forties and give me  
my man again;  
    Grant me to ride the saddle, swung clear of  
    the loosened rein.  
My scroll is dulled in its silver, the rust  
bites deep my sight—  
    Men forge them a newer comrade, who takes  
    ten loads at a bite.

Bring me the golden forties—times I am making  
my quest,

The blue yet bright on my barrel, into the  
gallant West.

Never have I forgotten, as men forget and  
deny,

The roar of a swollen fording, the gleam of  
a clearing sky.

Where is my man that named me, and notched his  
bear on my stock?

I'm fit this hour for service—a little  
grease on the lock.

Nay, but I yearn for service, the press of my  
man's lean jaw—

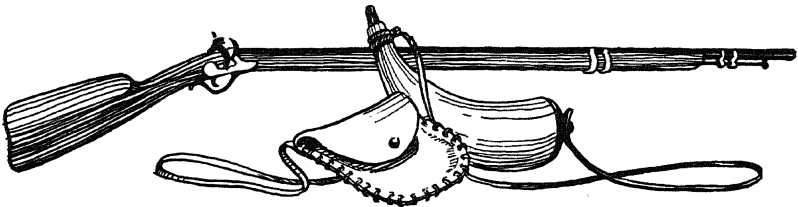
The easy tug at the trigger, when he lined  
the sights—and saw.

They leave me here in the silence—it never was  
my man's style—

To grieve for ball and powder, to yearn for a  
marksman's smile.

Bring me the fighting forties—and have your way  
with me then—

For I was a plainsman's rifle and took the  
trail with men!



WILLIAM BROWN

*JOAQUIN MILLER*

Poor William did what could be done;  
He swung a pistol on each hip,  
He gathered up a great ox-whip  
And drove right for the setting sun.

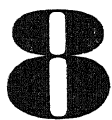
He crossed the big backbone of earth,  
He saw the snowy mountains rolled  
Like mighty billows; saw the gold  
Of great big sunsets; felt the birth

Of sudden dawn upon the plain;  
And every night did William Brown  
Eat pork and beans and then lie down  
And dream sweet dreams of Mary Jane . . .

TO THE FAR FRONTIER

*S. A. CLARKE*

You gathered on the far frontier  
And there equipped for distant wilds;  
To you the vistas that appeared  
Were changing for two thousand miles.

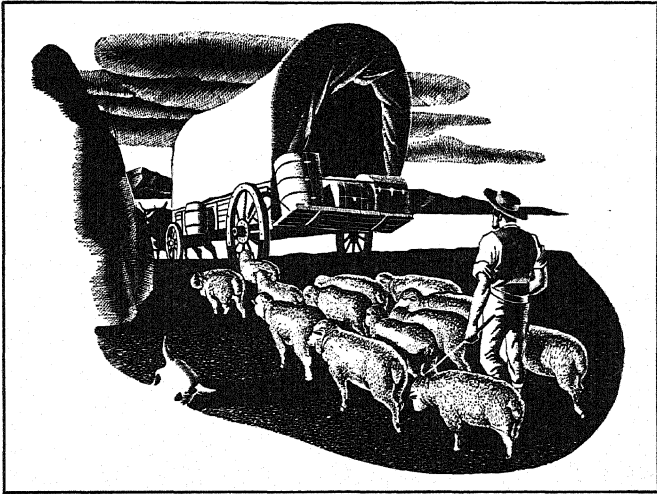


ROAD'S END

*So Noah, when he anchored safe on  
The mountain's top . . .  
He made it next his chief design  
To plant and propagate a vine. . .*

SAMUEL BUTLER





## **ROAD'S END**

“These emigrants. . . have the same right to come as I had to be here.”—Dr. John McLoughlin, 1847

**T**HE SANTA FE TRAIL was a traders' road, not the route of settlers, and the end of it was Santa Fe, which held lure, strangeness, adventure, excitement to "set men's hearts thumping." Said Josiah Gregg: "I doubt whether the first sight of the walls of Jerusalem were beheld by the crusaders with much more tumultuous and soul-enraptured joy."

The end of the Oregon Trail was settlement on claims far off from neighbors. The experience of crossing the plains, for all its hardships, was excitable and sociable. Then came this harder experience—a family's going off by itself to live remotely and lonesomely in a cabin. Said a pioneer woman of 1853: "We have been traveling with—25-18-14-129-3—wagons—now all alone—how dreary it seems."

The end of the Mormon Trail was the new Zion. They beheld the lighted Valley of the Great Salt Lake, "the land of promise, the place of long seeking, a spot whereon to plant a new Jerusalem."

At the end of the California Trail were mining camps in continued association with others. "Old, staid, conservative men and women. . . turned their faces westward. Stories exaggerated by inflamed imaginations broke the calm of a million hearts."

SONG OF THE FIRST SETTLERS

HOWARD MCKINLEY CORNING

YOU WILL remember us in the years to come—  
How we came in the far off time,  
And the wagon-wheels rolling, and the dust  
Drifting against the sunset. And destiny  
Pulled at our bootstraps.

*We are deep in your silence,  
We are the bright dream in the American memory.*  
After the buffalo plains and the high wild grass,  
After the scorching desert, the chill wind in the canyons;  
Chimney rock, Sweetwater, the bitter Snake;  
The mountains called Blue with the great timber  
And the hard grades toward journey's ending;  
We came to the broad Columbia, the west-flowing water—  
O the singing hearts of us!—we came to the green land.  
We were the first settlers!

Eighty, ninety, a hundred years ago—your thoughts will begin  
The first settlers: They were mountain men,  
They were mid-western farmers, wheelrights, preachers.  
They traded the beaver skin for a field and a furrow.  
(Remembering York State and the Wilderness Road,  
The sun on the butternut trees and the sycamores  
Deep in the Drowned Lands; remembering  
How the cardinal sang; remembering

The Father of Waters—the land of their waking.)  
The first settlers, the proud land claimers.  
They leaned their rooftrees on a mountain's shoulder,  
They ran their furrows shouting to the sunset.  
They are deep in our past.

You will remember us in the years to come:  
How we came in the bright new day  
Over the curve of the continent,  
Our dead beneath the trailway in the red Indian earth,  
Our campfires dying in the prairie night.

Say it was yesterday,  
Say it was many days since  
We toiled in the primitive earth in the land of our taking;  
And destiny pulled at our bootstraps.



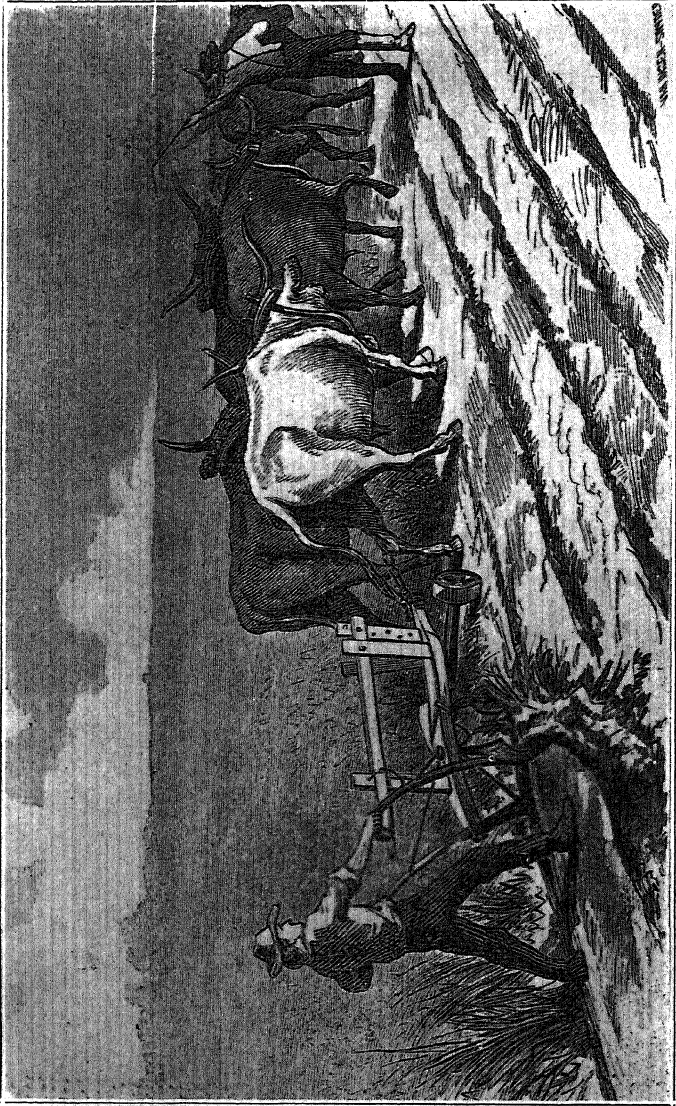
## A PLOW IN THE LOAD

*DONALD BURNIE*

. . . I TORE these fertile fields  
From the womb of a savage wilderness,  
My plow flinging the virgin odorous earth  
Upward to be kissed by the flaming sun.

I had followed my patient oxen  
Across the wide plains,  
Carrying my plow in the prairie schooner  
With my wife and five children.





*Courtesy Nebraska Historical Society*

**BREAKING THE PRAIRIE SOD**

## HUDSON'S BAY LOST TO THEM

DONALD BURNIE

We explorers,  
We trappers and hunters,  
We Hudson's Bay people,  
We soldiers of St. George,  
Lost an empire  
To a few wagonloads  
Of missionaries and farmers.

\* \* \*

*About 1500 persons, arrived last autumn, overland from St. Louis, bringing with them nearly 200 wagons. . . . They are branching out into every direction, and settling wherever fancy leads them. . . . One fellow has even marked a claim in the point of woods below the Fort. If he comes to build upon it, we are determined to eject him at all hazards, otherwise they will go on with their encroachments until they take possession of our very garden.*

—JAMES DOUGLAS OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY,  
FORT VANCOUVER, MARCH 5, 1845.

PRAYER AND SONG

*JOAQUIN MILLER*

WHAT psalms they sang!  
what prayers they said,  
Cabin or camp,  
as the wheels rolled west;  
Silently leaving  
their bravest, best—  
Paving a nation's path  
with their dead!

LET ME TOO

*MARY CAROLYN DAVIES*

O PIONEERS, who live within this brain  
And body: drivers of the slow ox train,

Settlers who built with muscle, ax, and gun,  
Neighbors to danger, friends of plain and sun,  
Let me find unknown worlds, nor be content,  
Till I too have with pain and slow content  
Stumbled across some trackless continent.

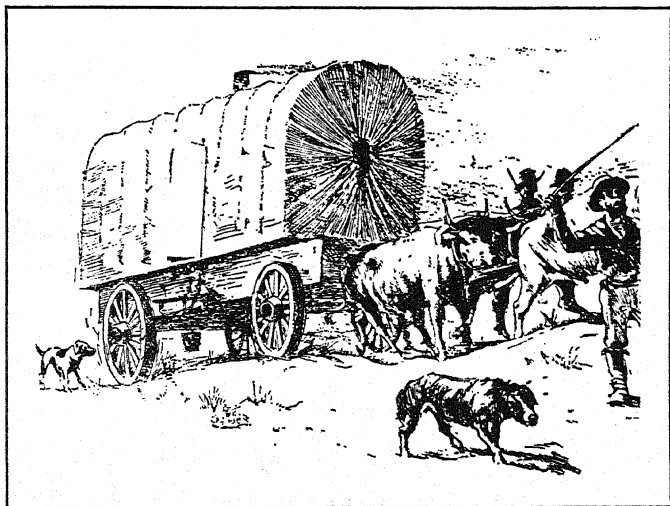




DIM TRAILS

*Some for tomorrow rashly pray,  
And some desire to hold today,  
But I am sick for yesterday.*

EDMUND GOSSE.



## **DIM TRAILS**

“Our old trail is nigh forgotten . . . where  
we journeyed with the sunset in our eyes.”

NOTED TRAILS . . . around them are gathered our frontier stories. In the East the most famous of these paths was the Old Wilderness Trail, also known as Boone's Trail. Next to the Oregon Trail, the greatest of the Western paths was the Santa Fe Trail . . . from Kansas City to the town of Santa Fe. The California Trail branched off from the Oregon Trail at the Raft River Crossing in [Idaho], and followed a southwesterly course through the Sierras to Sacramento. . . From Independence, Kansas, to Oregon City, Oregon, is 2,020 miles, and these were the terminals of the Oregon Trail, while the Santa Fe Trail was only 775 miles in length.

—C. J. BROSNAN

THE WAGONS WERE generally new, strong and well painted. All were covered with either linen or cotton drilling; some of the covers being painted or thoroughly saturated with boiled linseed oil, so as to more effectually exclude the rain. Some of the wagons had "California" painted on the cover; some of them displayed "Oregon" . . .

—J. QUINN THORNTON

HOW CANST THOU walk in these streets, who has trod the green turf of the prairies?

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

## THE LINCHPIN WAGON

*CARSON MASIKER*

Oh, the linchpin wagon  
    What memories it recalls  
Of the days when I gazed  
    On the mountains afar,  
As it ground through the sand  
    And the alkali dust—  
The linchpin wagon  
    With its bucket of tar.

Chorus—Wait for the wagon,  
    The linchpin wagon,  
    The linchpin wagon  
    With its bucket of tar.

How the smell of that tar  
    In my nostrils still lingers;  
How softly, yet firmly,  
    It stuck to my fingers.

The bed of this wagon  
    A ferry boat made.  
In the heat of the day  
    It was sought for its shade;  
The old pioneers  
    Will remember the test  
That this wagon withstood  
    In their journey out West.

THE OLD CAMP GROUND

*J. H. CRADLEBAUGH*

WHAT MEMORIES of those far-gone years come pouring in a flood,  
About the trip across the plains, the seeming endless road,

The dreary Platte, the mountain climb, and then the great  
reward

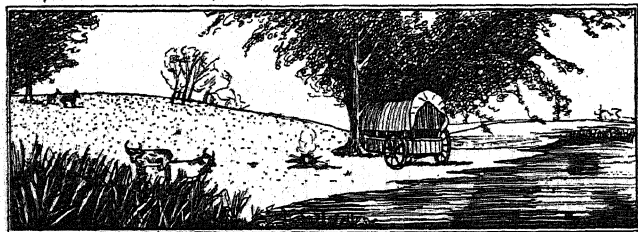
When after this their tired feet pressed the valley's emerald  
sward,

When cabin doors were opened wide, and hearts that knew  
not gates

Were open as the cabin doors to "strangers from the states",

And friendships then were formed that have grown stronger  
with the years

Explained in the expression: "Why, we all were pioneers." . . .



WEST AND WEST

*ABIGAIL SCOTT DUNIWAY*

COLORADO'S WILD steeps, and the rocks of Wyoming,  
Their lone, stunted pine trees, and steep palisades,  
And afar to the west the cold, bleak Rocky Mountains,  
At whose feet the wild buffalo feeds in the glades,  
Have each in their turn burst sublime on my vision,  
While deserts all desolate gazed at the sky,  
And away to the South rose snow-crested Wahsatch,  
Bald, bleak and majestic, broad, rolling and high . . .

I have rolled down the boulders and waked the weird echoes,  
Where serpents, affrighted, have writhed in their rage,  
And watched the fleet antelope bound o'er the desert,  
Through beds of bright cactus, brown greasewood and sage.

I have sailed on the breast of the Deseret Dead Sea,  
And bathed in its waters, all tranquil and clear,  
Have gazed on the mountains and valleys of Humboldt,  
Strange, primitive, awful, sad, silent and sere.  
I have climbed and re-climbed the steep, wind-torn Sierras,  
Peered in their deep gulches, all dark and obscure,  
Dreamed under the shadows of giant sequoias,  
Or talked with wild Indians, reserved and demure.

THE OLD EMIGRANT ROAD

*CARRIE BLAKE MORGAN*

AGED AND desolate, grizzled and still,  
It creeps in slow curves round the base of the hill;  
Of its once busy traffic is left little trace,  
Not a hoof-print or wheel-track is fresh on its face.  
Rank brambles encroach on its poor ragged edge,  
And bowlders crash down from the mountainside ledge;

The elements join to efface the dim trail,  
The torrents of springtime, the winter's fierce gale;  
Yet, with pioneer sturdiness, patient and still,  
It lingers and clings round the base of the hill;  
Outlasting its usefulness, furrowed and gray,  
Gaunt phantom of Yesterday, haunting Today.

LORDS OF THEMSELVES

*FRANCES FULER VICTOR*

WE TRACE the trails, time cannot dim  
The men of destiny have trod before,  
Leading an empire on a line  
Stretching from flashing brine to brine. . .  
Who blaze through untrod wilds the way  
Successive generations tread,  
Asking no more than this, to be  
Lords of themselves, in all things free.



## WAGON TRAILS

*MRS. PAULINE HENDERSON*

THEY climb the gently rounded hills  
They gash the far flung plain  
Like lines upon an aged face  
Deep-etched by Time and Pain.  
Just deep worn trails in prairie grass  
Beneath the prairie sky.  
Yet never can I look on them  
And heedless pass them by.

Tho years have wrought with diligence,  
The deep scars to erase,  
Still with mute eloquence they speak  
The Saga of a race.  
They paint bright pictures of romance  
They tell stern tales of strife  
They sing sweet songs of steadfast love  
They write a page of life!

## THE VANISHED TRAIL

*O. C. APPLIFICATE*

The plow of the settler has covered  
The old-time emigrant track.  
He has gathered the iron of wagons,  
Covered with an age of rust,  
And has mingled his golden corn  
With the old-time leaders' dust.

LAND WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE

*J. H. CRADLEBAUGH*

THEIR FLAGS, the wagon's canvas tops  
And "to win," their only vow.  
Dreamers and "seers," who dreaming saw  
And dreaming dared to do—  
Turning their faces toward the West  
And the land where dreams come true.

Dreamers they were, these pioneers  
Of the "Forties," three and four;  
Who braved the unknown of the plains  
In search of an untried shore.  
Brave of soul were the women folk,  
And the bearded men were strong,  
They counted not the trail was rough,  
Nor cared that the way was long.

Week after week, month after month,  
Steadily, surely but slow,  
They pressed on till they reached the streams  
Where the waters westward flow,  
And they could see the mountains where  
Night drew her curtain of blue  
Beyond which lay the land they sought—  
The land where the dreams came true. . .

## A HAUNTED ROAD TO THE WEST

GLENN WOOD DRESBACH

HERE'S A road to the West and it winds away  
Out over the Great Divide—  
Oh what do you hear and what do you see,  
All you who walk and ride?  
What do you see of the faces bronzed  
And muscles steeled for the day?  
Here brain and brawn of men who are gone  
Met rock and made you a way!

*What do you know of the strain of arms  
And eyes burned red in the sun?  
Here faith and thw made a dream come true  
And gave you a way to one!*

A haunted road to the West this is—  
As the haunted roads are spread  
From year to year and age to age  
And join the quick and dead,  
And ever the strength that goes before  
And ever the faith of the thing—  
Its beauty and might—that men built right,  
Lives on for the following.

\* \* \*

*God never made a mountain that He has not made a place  
for some man to go over it or under it and I'm going to hunt  
for it.*

—SAMUEL K. BARLOW, BUILDER OF THE BARLOW ROAD.

AT FORT LARAMIE TWENTY YEARS AFTER

ABIGAIL SCOTT DUNIWAY

. . . AND down the mystic, dreamy past  
In chastened mood I wander now,  
As o'er these prairies, old and vast,  
Move lines of oxen, tired and slow.  
Their rough-ribbed sides and hollow eyes  
And listless gaze and lazy tread,  
As under cloudless, burning skies  
Our way o'er trackless wastes they led,  
But visions are of long ago.

THE LONG ROAD HE BLAZED

CLAUDE THAYER

HE climbed the Rockies' rugged bars  
And stood, bared head, among the stars;  
Then, climbing to the Snake's scarred side,  
He dropped to meet Pacific's tide . . .

*Where earth and sky and ocean blend  
He breaks his final camp—the end  
Of that long road, through all the years  
He blazed—our last of pioneers.*

PIONEERS

BADGER CLARK

A BROKEN wagon wheel that rots away beside the river,  
*A sunken grave that dimples on the bluff above the trail;*  
The lark's call, the wind sweeps, the prairie grasses quiver  
And sing a wistful roving song of hoof and wheel and sail . . .

Pioneers, pioneers, the quicksands where you wallowed,  
*The rocky hill and thirsty plains—they hardly won your heed.*  
You snatched the thorny chance, broke the trail that others  
followed  
For sheer joy, for dear joy of marching in the lead.

Your wagon track is laid with steel; your tired dust is sleeping.  
*Your spirit stalks the valleys where a restive nation teems*  
Your soul has never left them in their sowing and their reaping  
The children of the outward trail, their eyes are full of  
dreams. . .



ABANDONED CONESTOGA

*VERNE BRIGHT*

This wagon is done with the trails and the rocks' inimical out-  
cry

Under the iron wheels; the rivers that thwarted its path;  
The parapets of wind; the sand where the slow snakes lie  
Drowsed in sulphurous slumber: done with the invigorate  
wrath

Of forests black with rain; of swamps in the fluctuant meadow:  
Done with the spring and its song, the wavewise prairies aglow  
With flowering laughter; the summer, dark with the mountain  
shadow;

The autumnal deserts of flame; the winter-deep valley of  
snow. . .

Done with ponderous harvest, the long way to woodlot and mill;  
Abandoned to scurrilous weeds, the insatiate teeth of the rust;  
Tunneled by blundering worms, broken of axle and thill;  
Old and empty of labor, left to the dreaming of dust. . .  
Now is the pause in the heart, (over, the danger and daring)  
And the quiet of unremembrance after the dogged wayfaring.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The broken heart and the heap of stones,*

*Wherever and ever the pine tree moans,*

*Our eyes are wet with a far-off grief.*

*Relief of grief that wounded us*

*On the cruel Western trail.*

E. I. DENNY

Coming of the White Man. William P. Burns. *Pacific Monthly*, Portland, February 1905.

### BY THE NOTED POETS

The seven poems in this section are from the collected works of the authors.

### BY THE EMIGRANTS

Crossing the Plains. Belle W. Cooke. *Tears and Victory*, E. M. Waite, Salem, Oregon, 1871.

Pioneer of Fifty-Three. Mrs. S. Watson Hamilton. *A Pioneer of Fifty-Three*, the Herald Press, Albany, Oregon, 1905.

An Emigrant Remembers. T. J. Kirk. A broadside "Crossing the Plains," 1901.

The Oregon Trail. Joseph W. Dorr. *On Sunset Shore*, Seattle, 1908.

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