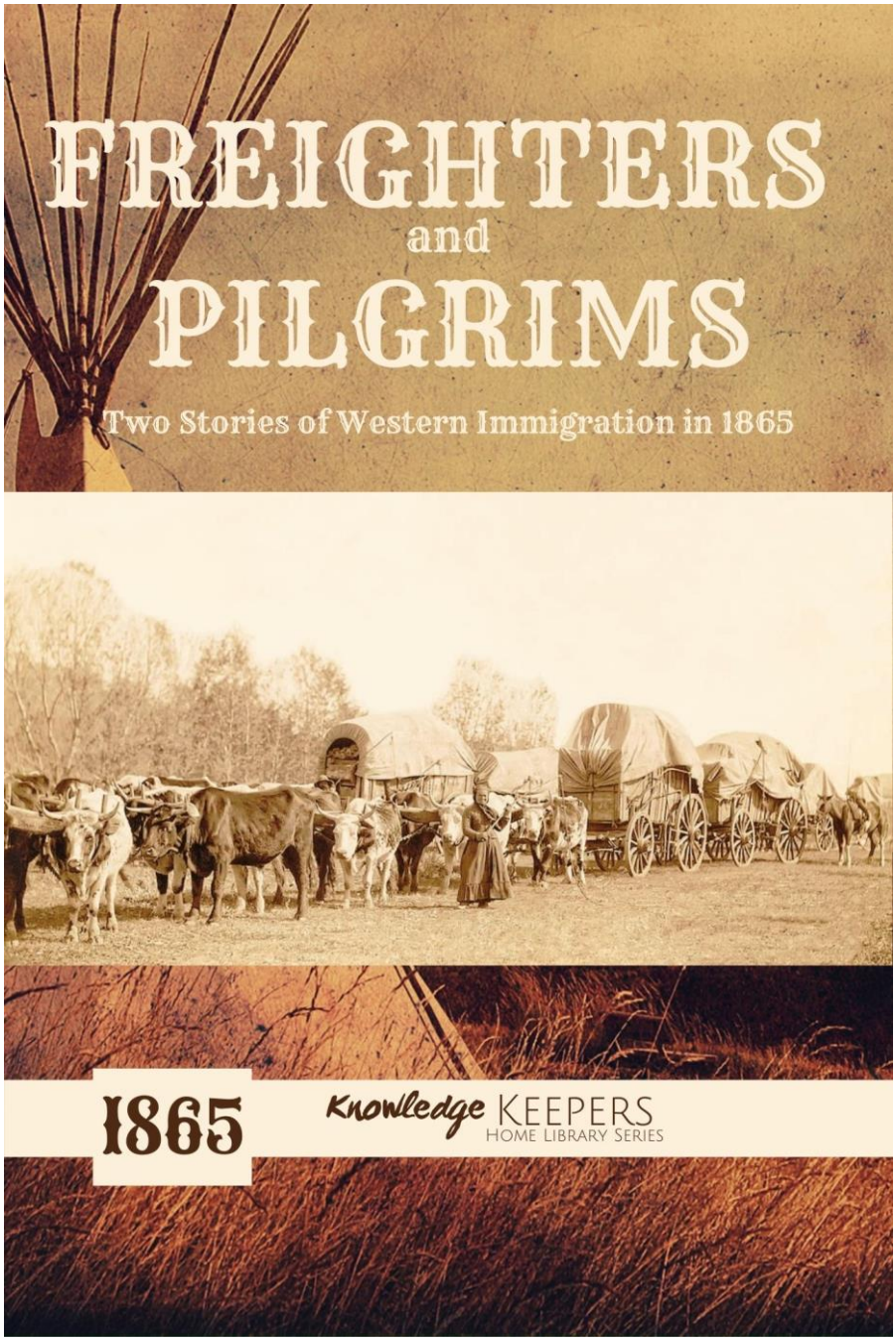
STUDY GUIDE

An educational study guide for teaching the history of the Oregon Trail from primary sources. Suitable for all ages in a variety of homeschool settings.



Created by Nicki Truesdell for Knowledge Keepers Bookstore

Freighters and Pilgrims: True Stories of Western Immigration in 1865 Study Guide

This book, though written over 100 years ago, is still a pretty easy read for today's kids. It can be read aloud to younger kids, or assigned reading to older kids. Parents, I think you will love it, too, so don't hesitate to read along!

Freighters and Pilgrims: True Stories of Western Immigration in 1865 is available at Knowledge Keepers Bookstore and on Amazon.

How to Use This Guide

I create my study guides for the way I homeschool: large family-group style, with all of my kids learning together as much as possible. With a book like this, I read the story aloud to all ages. We will follow the rabbit trails together. Younger kids may do less, while older kids will certainly do more.

Each chapter will look a bit different throughout the guide, depending on the topics. Since this is a historical narrative, I follow the flow of the timeline.

Homeschooling allows for so much flexibility in ages and grade levels, and I want you to have that flexibility with this guide! So it's up to you to choose which activities to use in your home.

Copywork: Print or cursive copywork is suitable for all ages, from beginning readers to high school students. I have inserted various quotes from *Freighters and Pilgrims* for copy work use. Feel free to adjust the length of the assignment to fit the needs of your own children. One sentence is perfect for younger students, while paragraphs are wonderful for high schoolers.

Map Activities: Wherever possible, geography activities are included. Seeing historic places on a map is so important, and is a natural way to learn geography. These are great for most ages, from elementary through high school. If your students are well-versed in world geography, you can certainly skip these.

BONUS LINKS: There are lots of fun added resources on the internet, so I've created a special page for you to access them all in one place on my website. Just go to KnowledgeKeepersBoostore.com/BonusLinks and click on the *Freighters and Pilgrims* book. The links are divided by chapter, along with more reading recommendations.

About the author: Despite my best efforts, I could find very little information on Charles E. Young except for his gravesite. See the Bonus Links page on KnowledgeKeepersBookstore.com for a link.

"Born in Virginia, USA **on** 25 May 1846 to Daniel T. Young and Sarah Fitch. Charles E Young married Eleanora Campbell and had 10 children. He passed away on 28 Mar 1922 **in** Luray, Virginia**."**

In 1865, America was nearing the end of the Civil War. The transcontinental railroad was well underway. Free land was available out west for those who would commit to living on it for 5 years. And because of that, the great migration westward was underway.

Freighters and Pilgrims: Two Stories of Western Immigration in 1865 is only two stories of thousands in that great migration. Both stories are true, firsthand written accounts of the journey.

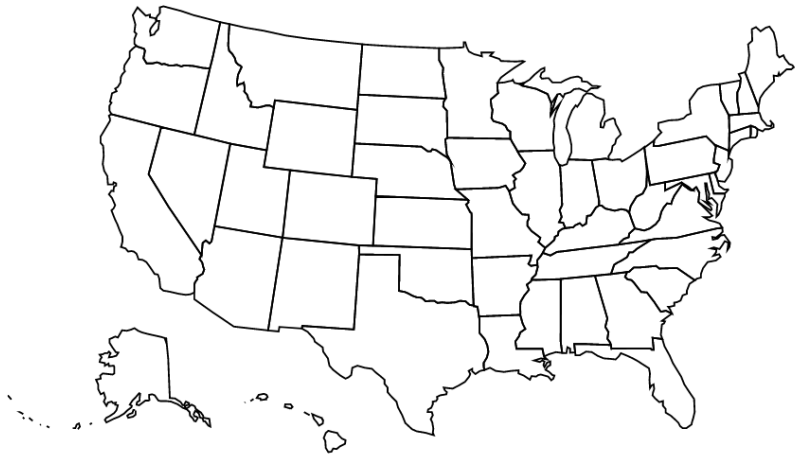
Advance research

1. The Homestead Act - Do a bit of research on the Homestead Act of 1862. Who issued it? What were the details?
2. Westward Trails – Look up the names of some of the main trails followed by immigrants going west.

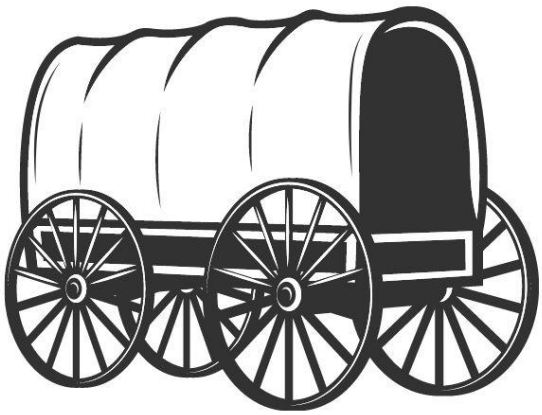
OregonTrailCenter.org has lots of fun resources for this study, including this map:

See Bonus Links.

The Homestead Act



Pioneer Trails



CHAPTER I

"YOUNG MAN, GO WEST"

Horace Greely

"Go west, young man" is a recognizable line from American history, and in this book we see that it influenced young men to do just that. Horace Greely wrote about in the New York Daily Tribune (July 13, 1865) after taking his own trip.

He said, "*Washington is not a place to live in. The rents are high, the food is bad, the dust is disgusting and the morals are deplorable. Go West, young man, go West and grow up with the country."*

Look up the specific article online.

This chapter tells us about **bushwhackers** and **bullwhackers**. They are completely different, though they sound similar.

- Missouri **bushwhackers** were southerners operating in a type of guerilla warfare along the borders of Missouri. They were not nice men. You can read more about them at *Civil War on the Western Border* at Bonus Links. You'll also find a link to the Bushwhacker Museum in Nevada, MO.
- A **bullwhackers** was a driver of an ox wagon or other heavy freight wagon, especially in the early settlement of the West.

Read an interesting article about the bull whip, the bullwhacker's most important tool, at the Bonus Links page.

A few more terms:

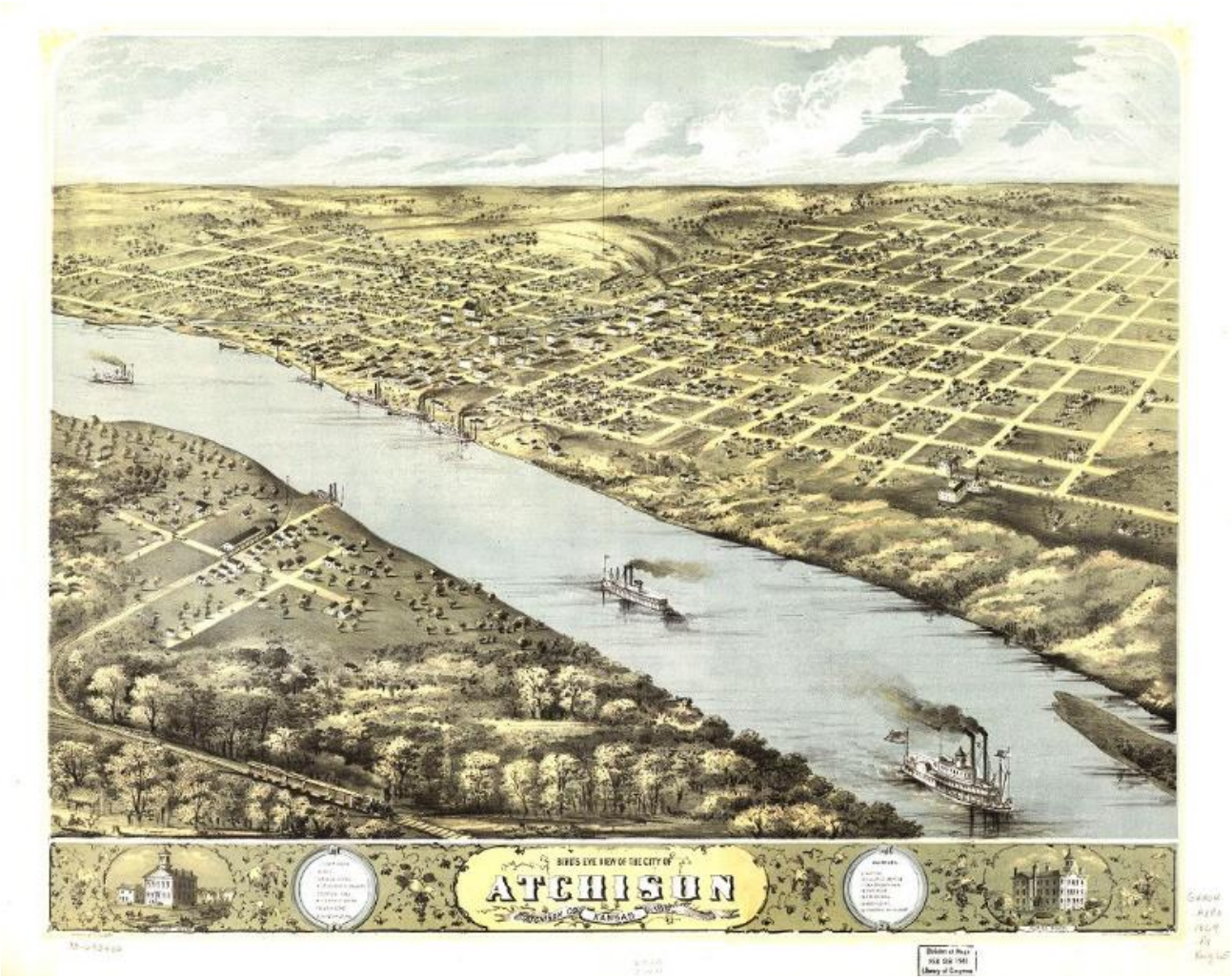
Lariat: a fifty foot line with a running noose at one end and made from the hide of various animals.

Wheelers: This was the last yoke of oxen next to the load. This expression was common with both bull and horse teams. It was their duty to hold the logs or wagon back.

Leaders: The most important animals of the whole team were the leaders. They had to place the team in the position for working. They had to respond to the voice commands of the bull punch.

(Bullwhacker terms courtesy of mendorailhistory.org, where you can find an entire list of these terms; see Bonus Links.)

As you will see, Mr. Young did not long stay on the actual Oregon Trail. His first stop was Atchison, Kansas. The illustration below is a bird's eye view of the city of Atchison in 1869.[i]



We read in chapter 1 that, *"There was also a skillet for baking bread, which resembled a covered spider without a handle.*" This is what it looked like:

CHAPTER II

ARRIVAL AT FORT CARNEY

The correct spelling is Kearny.

Arriving at Fort Carney we struck the Platte River trail leading to Denver. See a map and timeline of the Platte River trail, and read a bit more about it in the Bonus Links.

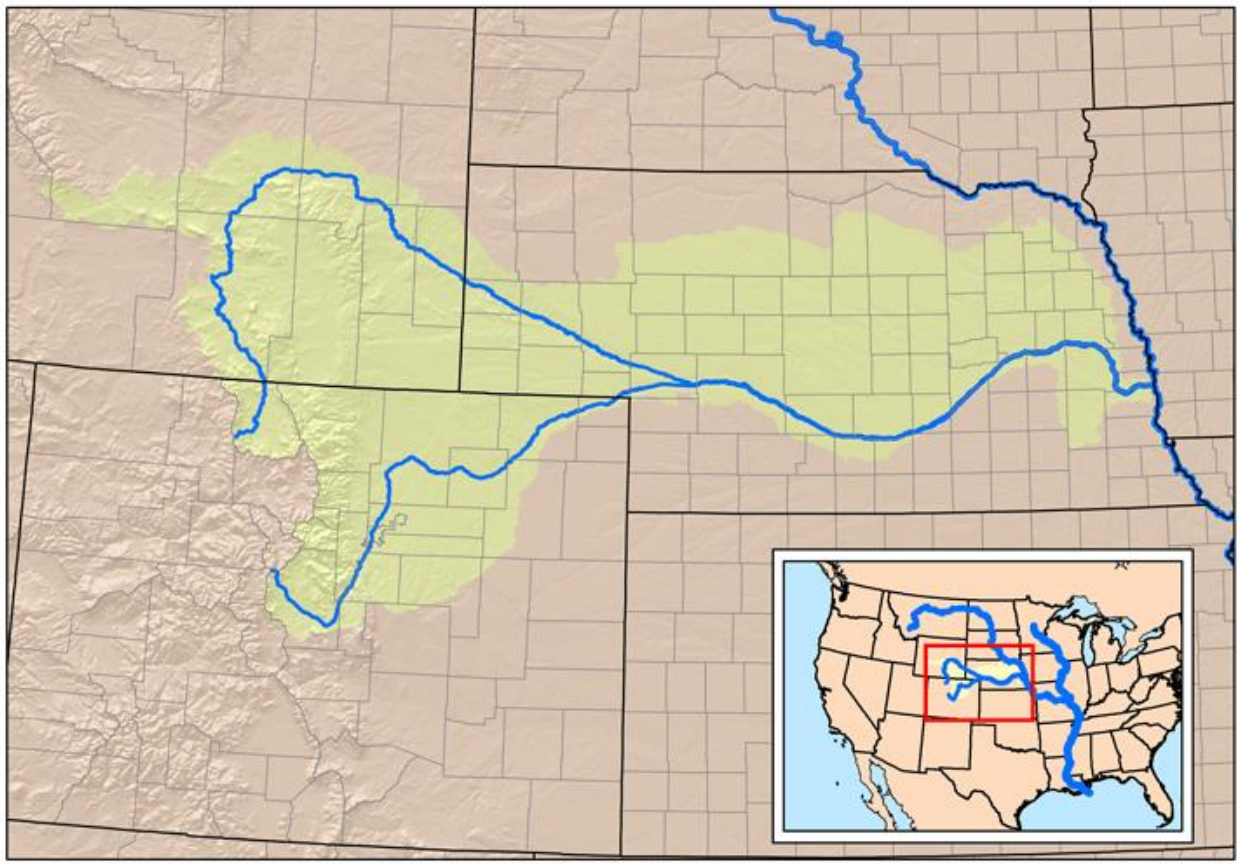
Charles describes that out here on the plains, “adobe ranches were built of sod.” Sod houses were made of blocks of sod (grass and dirt) cut right from the ground and stacked.

"The prairie dog, the fierce rattlesnake, and the beautiful little white burrowing-owl, occupied the same hole in the ground, making a queer family combination. Contrary to the belief of all dwellers and travelers of the plains in that day, Colonel Roosevelt claims it is not a fact that the three mentioned animals occupied the same quarters together, and that the story is a myth."

When he mentions Colonel Roosevelt, who do you think he's referring to? Look up the Bonus Links to find out!

Charles mentions Hostetters' Bitters in this chapter. It was a medicine that also doubled as an alcoholic drink. You can read a bit of the history of these Bitters in the Bonus Links.

The Platte River Valley



This map shows the Platte River flowing across Nebraska, and where it splits into the North Platte and the South Platte just before Colorado.[ii]

"*O'Fallon's Bluffs was a point where the river ran to the very foot of the bluffs making it necessary for all of the trains to cross, then again strike Platte river trail at Alkali Creek, the waters of which were poisonous to man and beast*."

This is one of the places along the old Oregon Trail where the wagon train ruts are still visible today! It was a landmark on the trail where many, many pioneers traveled.

Read a little about O'Fallons Bluffs in the Bonus Links.

ABUSES OF THE INDIAN DEPARTMENT

This is an interesting bit of commentary from the author. Since he lived at the time these treaties and the Indian attacks happened, it's safe to say he had a good grasp on the facts. What do you think?

Frederick Remington

The author mentions artist Frederick Remington in this chapter. Remington was an American painter, illustrator, sculptor, and writer wo specialized in the Old West. The painting below is his work entitled, "The Emigrants."

Just as *Freighters and Pilgrims* is a firsthand account of pioneers traveling west, Remington's art is firsthand depictions of the people moving west. He lived among them and illustrated their lives. What an amazing bit of history!

You can learn more about Remington and see his art in the Bonus Links.

CHAPTER III

AN ATTACK BY THE INDIANS

The historic City of Black Hawk is a home rule municipality located in Gilpin County, Colorado, United States. The city population was 127 at the 2020 United States Census, making Black Hawk the least populous city in Colorado. The tiny city is a historic mining settlement founded in 1859 during the Pike's Peak Gold Rush. Black Hawk is now a part of the Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO Metropolitan Statistical Area and the Front Range Urban Corridor. Black Hawk is located adjacent to Central City, another historic mining settlement in Gregory Gulch. The two cities form the federally designated Central City/Black Hawk National Historic District. The area flourished during the mining boom of the late 19th century following the construction of mills and a railroad link to Golden. (Wikipedia)

Charles writes: "The following afternoon our train reached town and we joined it during the evening to be ready for an early start for Golden City, the entrance to the mountains leading to Black Hawk and Central City where our freight was consigned. The most hazardous part of our trip was before us, one that to this day makes me shiver when I think of it. The first team entered the canyon at 11 A. M. in a blinding snowstorm. The road for nearly the entire distance was hewn from solid rock out of the side of steep mountains, gradually ascending to a great height, then descending to what seemed a bottomless canyon. We finally arrived at Guy Hill, the most dangerous part of the route."

Golden Canyon, Colorado

CHAPTER IV

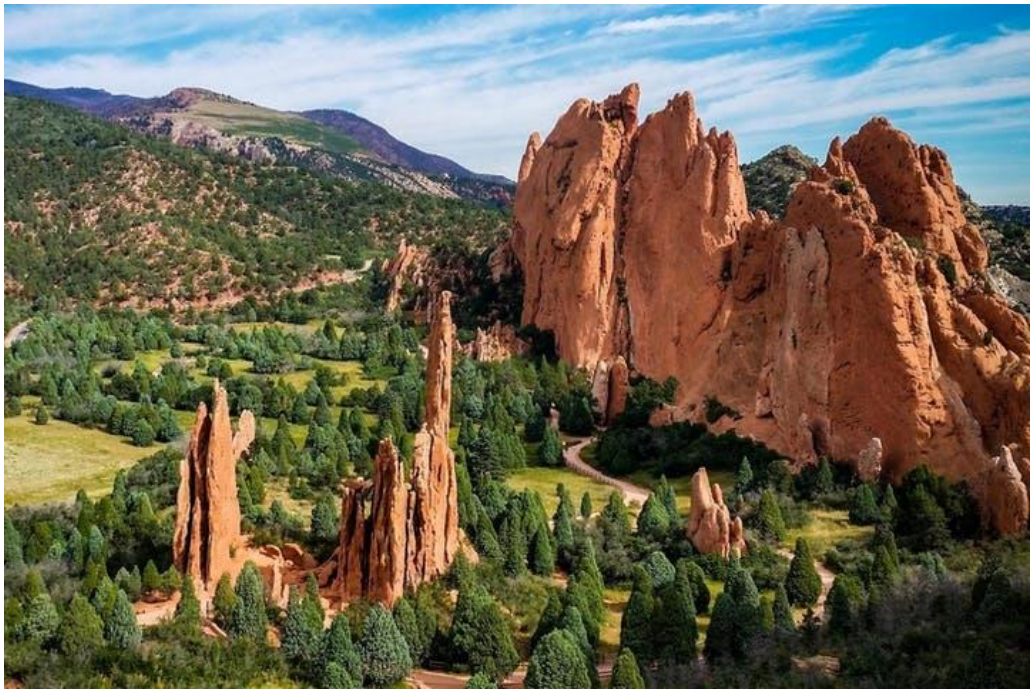
DENVER IN 1865

Road agents: another name for robbers and thieves who would hold up travelers at gunpoint and steal their belongings.

LaPorte is a town outside Fort Collins. Charles described it as “a city of adobe ranches.” You can read a little LaPorte history in the Bonus Links.

Charles writes, “Before leaving the governor's employ, I accompanied a mule train of ten wagons with supplies for the Ute tribe of Indians who lived in one of the parks of the mountains in the vicinity of Pike's Peak. The Utes, at that particular time, were on friendly terms with the white men as there was a treaty of peace existing between them and the Government.”

This “park” is now known as Garden of the Gods, located in Colorado Springs. It is a beautiful area!



CHAPTER V

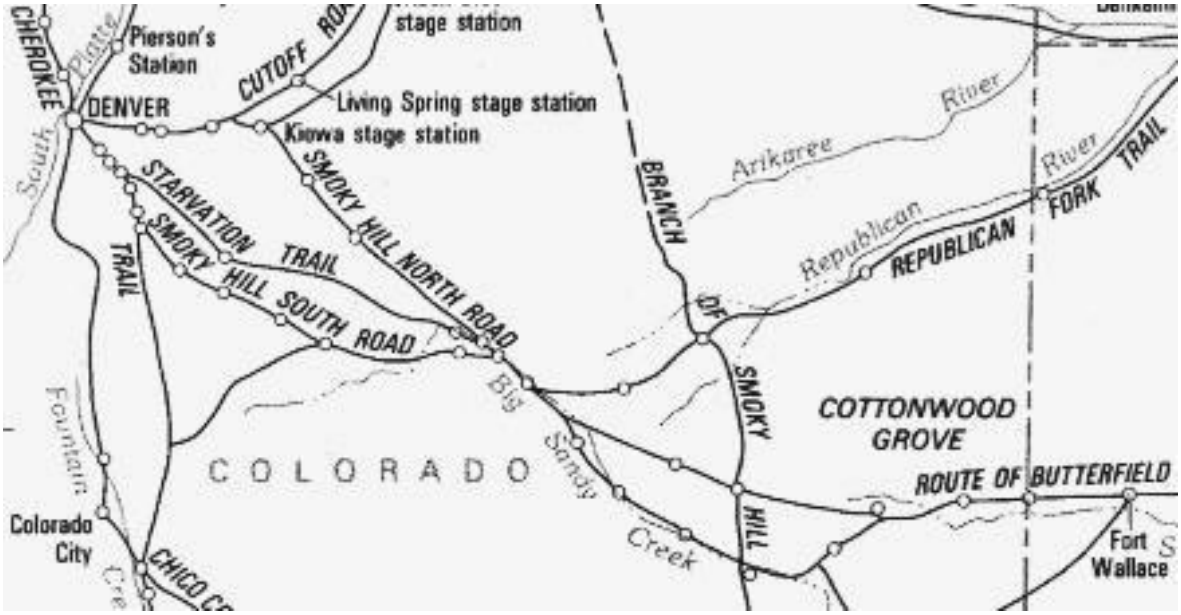
A PROOF OF MARKSMANSHIP

There are no study notes for this chapter

CHAPTER VI

ON TO LEAVENWORTH

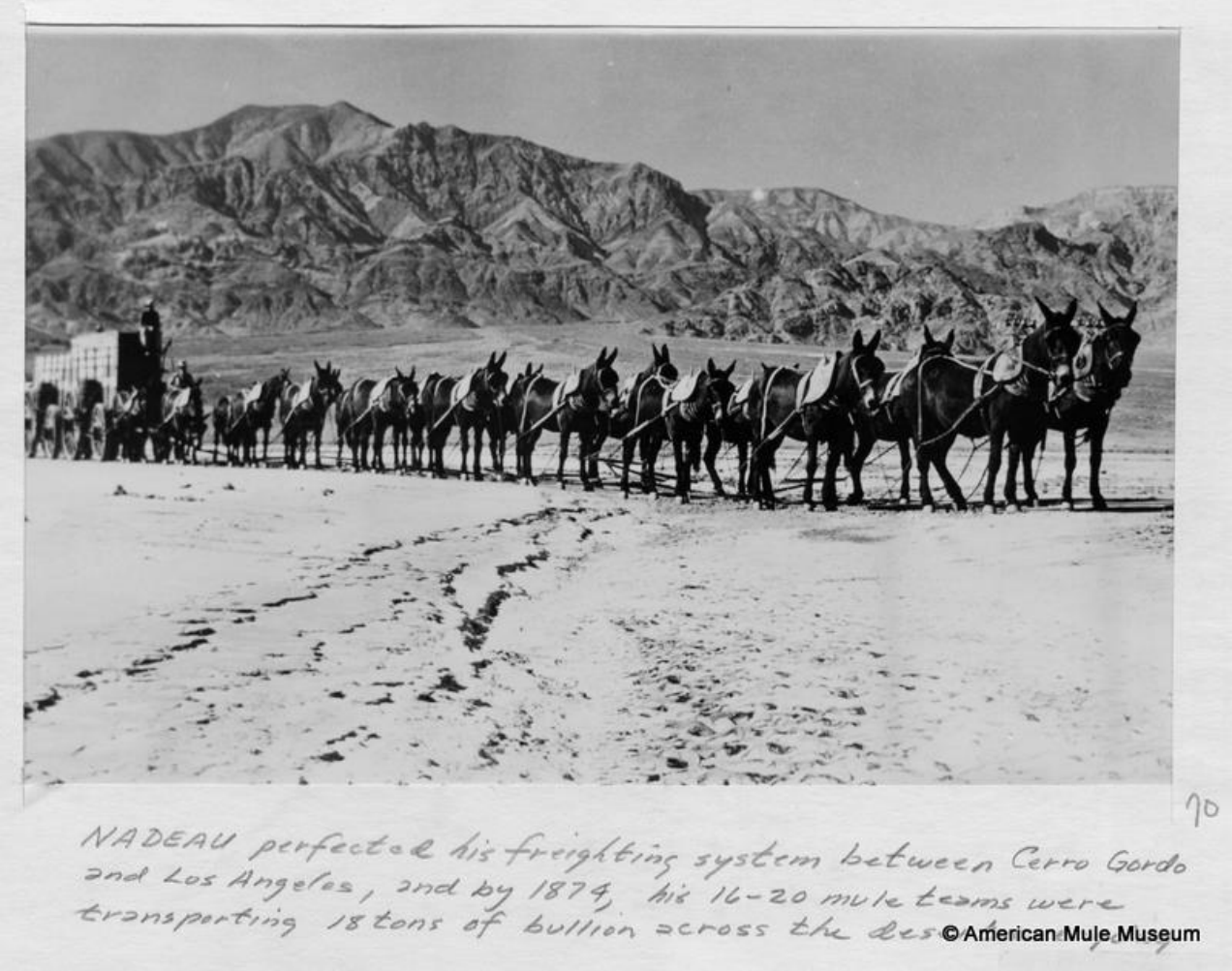
"The next summer I was not very well, and so I made a trip to Leavenworth, Kansas, by the Southern or Smoky Hill route. We made the trip by mule train of twenty wagons with six mules hitched to each."



Besides ox teams, mule teams were the other main engine for moving people and freight across the plains. The Bonus Links contain several great sites with information on these mule teams:

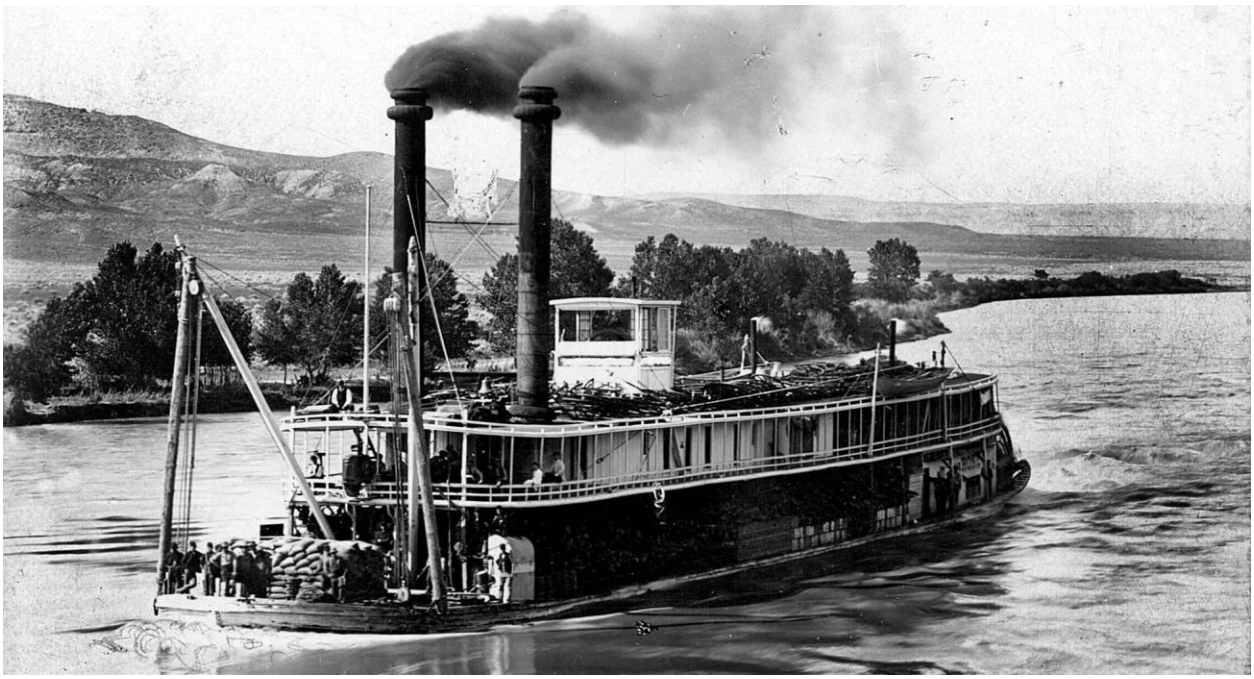
- American Mule Museum
- Oregon Trail Center
- Kids-N-Cowboys

A term not mentioned in this book is "mule skinners," which is the name of the mule team drivers.



"I boarded a Missouri River palace for St. Louis, thence to New Orleans."

A "Missouri River palace" is a fancy name for a steamboat. These were popular in the 1800s on many rivers in America, including the Missouri River and Mississippi River. They were used to move people and freight around the country by water ways. Some of them were very fancy, like modern cruise ships are today.



All boats plying on the Missouri River at that time were flat bottom with paddle wheel at the stern. See Bonus Links for an online steamboat museum!

“The following morning we made an early start, and before noon rolled into La Port, on the Cachella Poudre River…”

“My companion on that dangerous trip was a plucky son of the Emerald Isle.”

Son of the Emerald Isle was another way to say *Irishman.*

CHAPTER VII

A PLUCKY GERMAN

Once again, Charles uses his talent for description when he describes pine trees as the "tall sentinels of the hills."

The Transcontinental Railroad

"The Union Pacific railroad had then reached Julesburg…"

This is an entire study in itself! During the Civil War, Congress passed the Railroad Act of 1862. This would link the east with the west, and create two new railroad companies.

Look up the story of the Transcontinental Railroad.

The Homestead Act

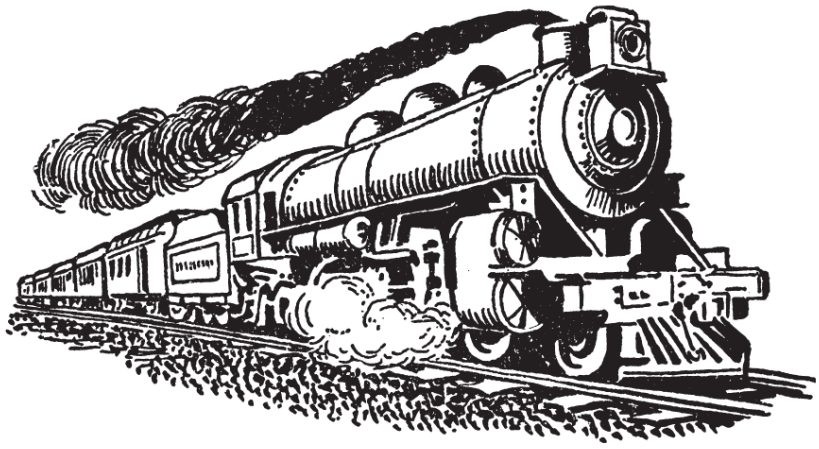
"…this man and myself were to go there and squat or take possession of two sections of Government land, consisting of one hundred and sixty acres each, located just outside the city limits."

Charles is referring to a way to get free land through the Homestead Act of 1863. This Act was what inspired so many Americans to travel west, just like the two authors in this book. To "squat" mean to camp out or live on the land.

Look up the Homestead Act to find out what the requirements were.

Homestead Act

Transcontinental Railroad



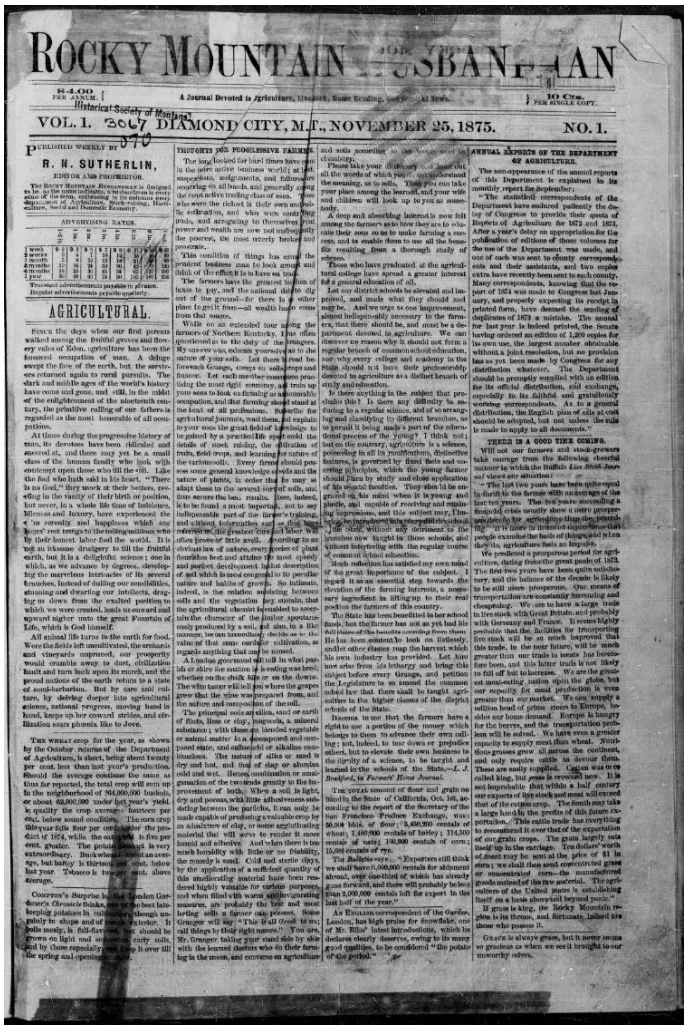
DAYS ON THE ROAD

CROSSING THE PLAINS IN 1865

BY

SARAH RAYMOND HERNDON

This study guide is divided by the state or territory through which the author traveled.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN HUSBANDMAN

$4.00 PER ANNUM. A Journal Devoted to Agriculture, Stock, Home Reading, and General News. 10 Cts. PER SINGLE COPY.

VOL. 1. DIAMOND CITY, M.T., NOVEMBER 25, 1875. NO. 1.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY

R. N. SUTHERLIN,

EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

AGRICULTURAL.

THOUGHTS FOR PROGRESSIVE FARMERS.

ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

THERE IS A GOOD TIME COMING.

This journal of the trail was originally published in *The Husbandman.*

You can visit Sarah Raymond Herndon's grave today in the quaint, restored mining town of Virginia City, Montana.

Read more about these in Bonus Links.

Sarah Raymond is the author of this journal. Sometimes she is referred to as "Sallie" by her relatives. Her bothers are William Hillhouse (referred to mostly as Hillhouse) and Winthrop. Her mother is Delilah. The horse's name is Dick.

GEOGRAPHY

As you read through the journal, see if you can find the towns and cities Sarah mentions along the way. Use the included blank map to trace her journey. The wagon train begins this story in Missouri, heading north into Iowa, and west to Nebraska. They travel through a corner of Colorado, up into Wyoming, a bit of Utah, and finally to Montana. Each location mentioned in the journal is marked with 🌎 and usually includes a small map.

COPYWORK

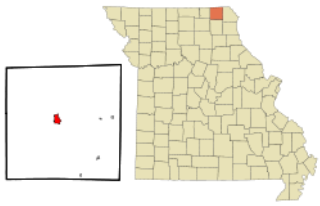
Some of Sarah's descriptions are perfect for copywork! Use the included notebooking pages to copy them in print or cursive. Copywork portions are marked with ✎.

VOCABULARY

There are some possibly new and interesting terms in this diary. Look them up!

MISSOURI

May 1:



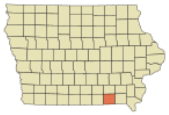
Vocabulary: prairie schooner

- **Memphis (Missouri)**

May 2:

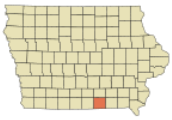
- We crossed the dividing line—though we did not see it—between Missouri and Iowa.

Vocabulary: "breakfast food," sheet-iron stove, riding-habits



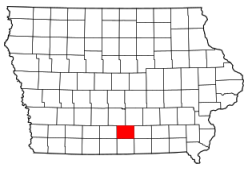
- Bloomfield, Iowa
- Drakesville, Iowa

Friday, May 5.



- Unionville and Moravia

Saturday, May 6.



- We came through Iconium early in the day, are camping in Lucas County

- *"I am so sorry for you, yet I believe that in some way it will be for the best, you know the promise, 'All things work together for good, to those who love the Lord."*

Sunday, May 7.

- "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."

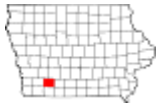
Tuesday, May 9.

- We came through Ottawa and Osceola, are camping in Clark County.

Thursday, May 11

- We came through Afton to-day.

Friday, May 12



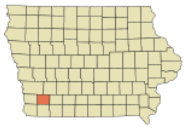
- We came through Queen City this morning, and this afternoon came to a town of French people, called "The Icarian Community."
- We stopped within sight of Quincy

You can learn more about Icarians in the Bonus Links.

Monday, May 15.

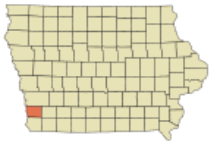
- We were about three miles from Frankfort when the accident happened

Wednesday, May 17



- We came through Redoak

May 18



- We came through Whitecloud, Glenwood and Pacific City to-day
- Pacific City is on the Missouri [river] bottom, or lowlands.

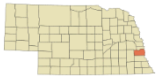
NEBRASKA

Nebraska played a very large and important role in the westward movement. Knowledge Keepers has published two other books that are related: *True Stories of Nebraska Pioneers* and *Up the Western Trail*. Check them out in Bonus Links.

Friday, May 19.

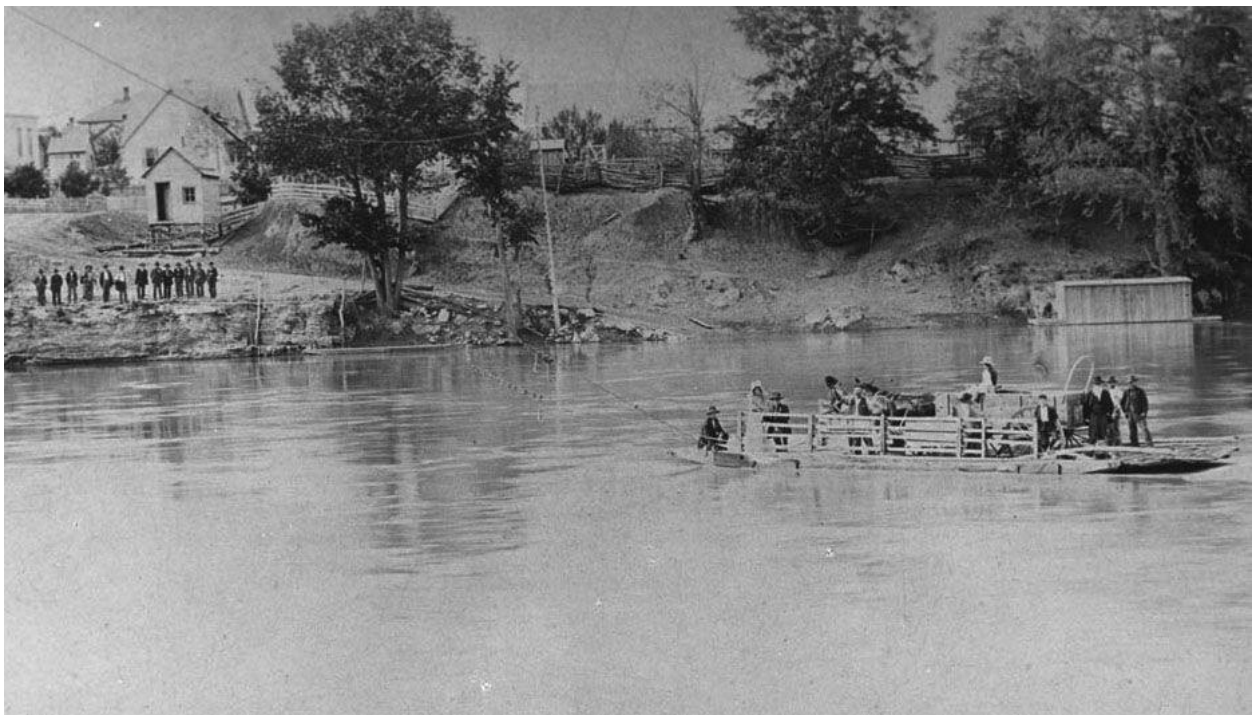
🌎 I went over to Platsmouth [Nebraska] on the ferryboat

When Sarah says, "…the houses are built of canvas instead of lumber, brick or stone," what does she mean?



Wednesday, May 24.

Sarah writes, "We were up with the earliest dawn, and our own individual outfit ready for a very early start, yet it was the middle of the forenoon before all the wagons were landed on the west bank of the Missouri. It takes a long while to ferry fifteen wagons across the river."

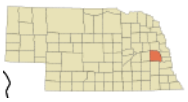


A wagon crosses a river on a ferry in the 1800s.

About what time is "the middle of the forenoon?"

Have you ever crossed water on a ferry? They are very different now than in Sarah's day.

Saturday, May 27.



- We came to Ashland, on Salt River

Wednesday, May 31.

- We are camping in the valley of the Platte. We are obliged to stop at the stage-stations.

You can visit the Rock Creek Stage Station in Nebraska. See Bonus Links for more info.

Saturday, June 3.

Sara writes, “Here we are on the Platte with about two hundred wagons in sight. We are now on what is known as “The Plains.” My idea of the plains has been very erroneous, for I thought they were one continuous level or plain as far as the eye could reach, no hills nor hollows, but it is nothing else than the Platte River Valley with high bluffs on either side. There is some timber on the banks, but the timber of any consequence is on the islands in the middle of the river, out of reach of the axe of the emigrant. This is the junction of the roads from St. Joe and Plattsmouth, and that is why there are so many wagons here to-night.”

June 5

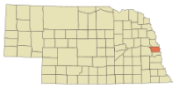
- As far as the eye can reach, before us and behind us, there are wagons, wagons, wagons;

June 7

- When the captain finds a place for the corral, he rides out where all can see him, and gives the signal, the first and central wagons leave the road; the first to drive to where the captain stands, the other and all behind it cross over a sufficient distance to form the corral by the wagons stopping, so as to form a gateway, for the stock to pass through, turned so that they will not interfere with each other when hitching. The next wagon drives to position, with the right-hand side of cover almost touching the left-hand or back, outer edge of the wagon in front, with tongues of wagons turned out, so that all can be hitched to at one time. In this way the entire corral is formed, meeting at the back an oblong circle, forming a wall or barrier, the cattle cannot break through. The horses are caught and harnessed outside the corral, but the cattle have to be driven inside to be yoked.

Friday, June 9.

- We came through a little town—Valley City.



Sarah notes, “The gentleman of the house is postmaster, and has his office in the room across the hall from the parlor.”

Very often, the post office and telegraph office were operated in just this way as a town was just starting out.

Saturday, June 10.

FORT KEARNEY

The United States Army established Fort Kearny in 1848 at the site where several smaller overland trails merged into the wider Oregon Trail to provide supplies and military escorts to wagon trains and others traveling through lands still claimed by local tribes. It was one of several such western military bases established as the army sought to wrest land from native control and subdue its inhabitants. (Platte Basin Time Lapse online)

Read the story of Fort Kearny in Bonus Links.

Sarah says, “We were told that these soldiers were in the Confederate service, were taken prisoners, confined at Rock Island, and enlisted in the Government service to come out here and fight Indians. They are from Georgia and Alabama.”

Monday, June 12.

Sarah writes, “We stood by the graves of eleven men that were killed last August by the Indians. There was a sort of bulletin-board about midway and at the foot of the graves stating the circumstances of the frightful tragedy. They were a party of fourteen, twelve men and two women, wives of two of the men. They were camped on Plum Creek, a short distance from where the graves are. They were all at breakfast except one man who had gone to the creek for water, he hid in the brush, or there would have been none to tell the tale of the massacre.”

On Aug. 8, 1864, more than 100 Indians attacked a wagon train carrying freight from Sidney, Iowa, to Denver. Eleven people were killed in the attack, including Thomas Morton, the owner of the freight wagons, and his brother-in-law, William Fletcher and his wife’s cousin, John Fletcher. (From the Lexington Clipper-Herald; See Bonus Links for the full story. Warning: it is gruesome.)

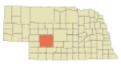
Sarah comments, “…any number of the dreaded savages could hide, and shoot down the unwary traveler with the guns and ammunition furnished them by the United States Government.”

This echoes what Charles wrote in the first story of this book, doesn't it?

Remember O'Fallon's bluffs from Charle's story? Sarah comments, "The bluffs near here are quite high and abrupt."

June 18

- camping on Fremont's Slough
- We are camped on the banks of the South Platte



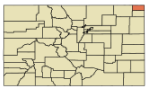
Sarah notices, "There is a town of prairie dogs near." Sarah and Charles both write about many common occurrences on this trail.

Did you know that Lewis and Clark were the first Americans to write about the prairie dog?

COLORADO

Thursday, June 22.

- We came through a place called Star Ranch, or Old California Crossing. We are camped twelve miles below Julesburgh. (Julesburg)



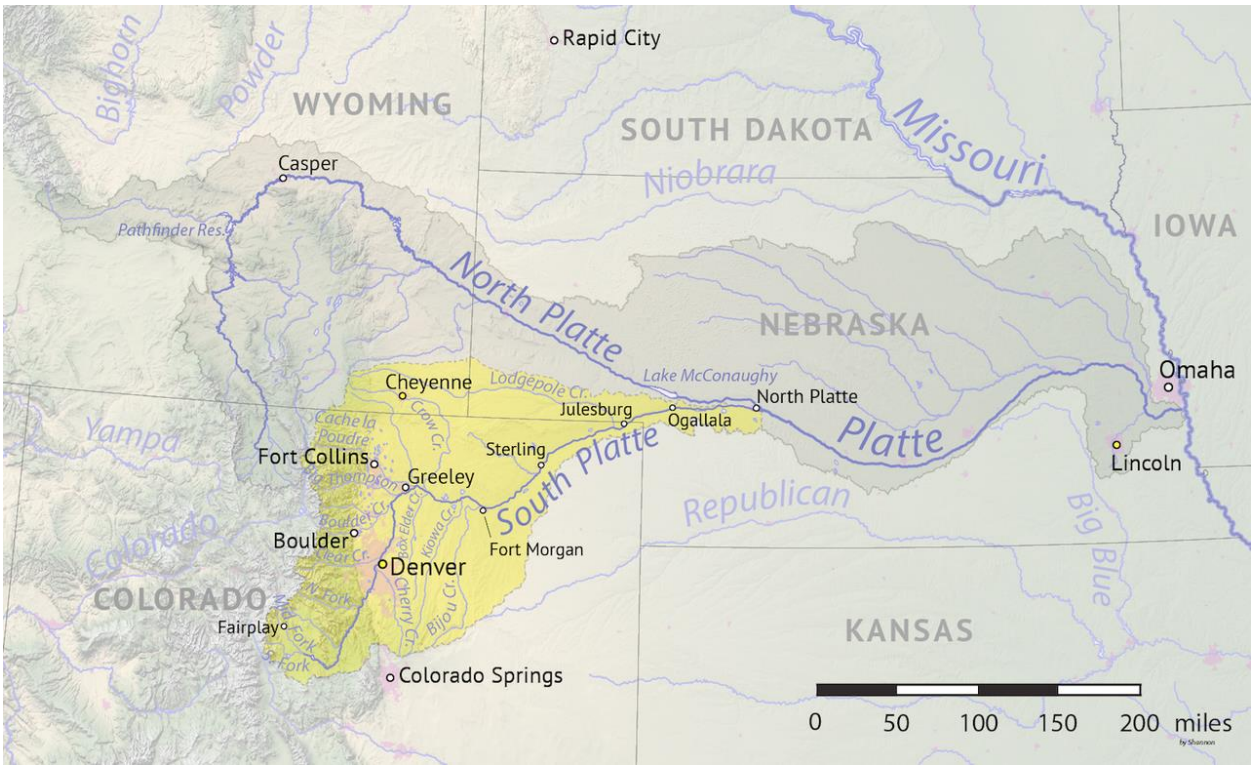
Friday, June 23.

- We are camping in Colorado. Came through Julesburgh (Julesburg)

June 27

Sarah writes that they, "…let the wheels sink into the mud so that they had to double teams to get them out."

Heavy wagons stuck in the mud required more horses or oxen to pull them out, so they "double teamed."



North and South Platte; Wikipedia

Friday, June 30.

- We are only six miles below the crossing of the South Platte.

July 1

Wagons have been crossing all day

- on the north side of the South Platte, at the eastern extremity of Fremont's Orchard

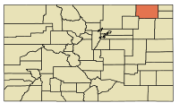
Sara muses, "Oh, for the pen of a Dickens to describe this wonderful scene, which no one ever has or ever will see again, just as it is."

Think about what she says! There are things she witnesses that we will never see. It's so wonderful to have her descriptions in writing!

Monday, July 3.

- *The scenes in this great expanse of low, level land on the north side of the Platte in the early hours of this morning is hard to describe. Corrals and camps here, there and everywhere. Cattle and horses being driven into corrals to be harnessed and yoked, men and women cooking by camp-fires and on stoves, everybody seemed to be in a great hurry, all was animation and life, men riding after horses, oxen and mules; yelling, hallooing and calling, but not a profane oath did I hear. Among so many children, we rarely ever hear a child cry, and never hear a woman scold.*
- the Sand Hills

July 5

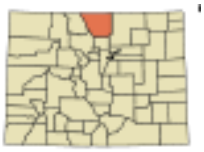


- We are at the mouth of the Cache la Poudre—where somebody cachéd their powder.

Vocabulary: cache

Somebody cached the gunpowder, to keep it dry.

Friday, July 7.



- We are camped at the foot of the Black Hills. They seem like immense mountains to me. There are four large corrals near the little village of La Porte.

July 9

Sarah remarks, "I had Mrs. Prentiss's delightful book, '*Stepping Heavenward*,' to read." This *is* a delightful book, especially for girls and ladies.

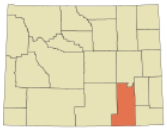
WYOMING

WE CUT OUR NAMES IN STONE Monday, July 10.

There is a place in Wyoming where you can still see the names of people carved into the stone. See the Bonus Links for a video tour.

July 11

- We left the hills at noon and are camping on Laramie Plains



Wednesday, July 12.

- We crossed the Big Laramie River just before noon

  Sarah comments, "Some of the boys went seining." Seining is a type of fishing with huge nets.

July 13

Sarah tells us, "Dick [the horse] drank alkali water this evening. I have been feeding him fat bacon; no doubt the grease and alkali have turned to soap before now in his stomach, and soap is not poison, so he will not die this time, and I will take better care of him the next time we are near alkali."

Alkali sickness was just one of the dangers of travel on the Oregon Trail. See the Bonus Links for an "Oregon Trail Science Lesson" that discusses this and other diseases encountered on the trail.

Sunday, July 16

We saw with our own eyes—just before we came to Rock Creek—a station that had been burned and all the inmates killed or taken prisoners.

You can visit Rock Creek station. See the Bonus Links for more info. We crossed Rock Creek on a toll-bridge

July 18

- We came to the foot of Elk Mountain, on the Medicine Bow, about nine o'clock.

July 19

- We came through Fort Halleck to-day

Fort Halleck represents the single and strategic military establishment located along the transcontinental thoroughfare historically known as the Overland Trail. The building of the Fort was prompted by the hostile Indian warfare existing on the Plains during the early 1860s and its primary purpose was to aid in keeping the line of transportation open between the East and the West. Fort Halleck was established at the base of Elk Mountain on the northern extremity of the Medicine Bow range. (Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office)

Read more about Fort Halleck in Bonus Links.

Sarah writes, "I paid eighty cents for a quire of writing paper." A *quire* is 24 or 25.

WE CROSS THE NORTH PLATTE Thursday, July 20.

- *The men have taken the herds five miles away to get good feed. They are in danger from Indians. The captain called for volunteers. My brothers both offered to go, but the captain said, "Only one of Mrs. Raymond's boys must go."*
- *Hillhouse said he would be the one. He was on guard last night, too.*
- *We are in no danger here, for there are several trains here now and there will be more to-night. Oh, the anxious watching, the prayerful longing for day that we must endure this night, because of loved ones exposed to danger. What a precious privilege that we can go to the Mercy-seat with the assurance that if we ask aright our petitions will be granted. How do people live without Christ and a Mercy-seat? What can they do, when suffering anxiety, grief, or bereavement, if they cannot go to Jesus with their sorrows? Precious Saviour, what a refuge in time of trouble, what a joy to carry everything to God in prayer.*

See the Bonus Links for an excellent piece called "Crossing the North Platte."

Saturday, July 22.

- We are within sight of Pine Grove in Wyoming Territory.

Monday, July 24.

We passed the summit of the Rockies to-day, and are camping on the western or Pacific slope to-night

- We came through Bridger's Pass to-day, crossed a toll bridge near Sulphur Springs
- We are camping two miles west of Sulphur Springs.

Sarah mentions "passing the summit of the Rockies," without much excitement. But just think about crossing the Rocky Mountains on a wagon!

Wednesday, July 26.

- We are near a fine spring of most excellent water—Barrel Spring it is called

Mountain Fever is mentioned here.

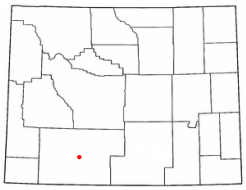
Mountain Fever – With symptoms such as intestinal discomfort, diarrhea, headache, skin rashes, respiratory distress and fever, this ailment was usually not fatal. The diseases that fit these symptoms include Rocky Mountain spotted fever, typhus, typhoid fever, and scarlet fever. Quinine water was used to treat the fever. (Legends of America)

July 30

- We are traveling on Bitter Creek

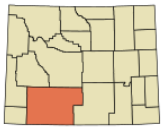
Tuesday, August 1.

- We are at Point of Rocks.



Sarah writes, "The place is rightly named; one who never saw them could hardly imagine such enormous piles of rock; they are high as mountains, with scarcely any dirt among them, the sides are smooth and even, the stone is soft like slate or sandstone, and the whole face of the enormous pile, as high as man can reach, is literally covered with names, dates, and places of former residence from all over the United States."

Friday, August 4.



She says, "The wolves howled around our camp all last night and kept Cæsar—our watch-dog—barking; so we could not sleep. Have made only a short drive, and are camping at Rock Springs, where the road forks."

Aug 6

- We arrived at Green River about three o'clock

August 9

- We passed the Bridger Road, where our friends going to California will turn off

WYOMING
SHORTCUT TO THE GOLDFIELDS
BRIDGER TRAIL–1864
This region is totally unfit for either rail or wagon roads and can only be traversed with the greatest of difficulty.
– U.S. Army Lieutenant Henry Maxfield, while attempting to map a wagon route across the Big Horn Basin in 1860
You are standing near the Bridger Trail which is visible as you look towards Bridger Butte to the north. The Devil's Backbone, the roughest descent on the trail, is located at the northern edge of the plain as the trail drops down into the Whistle Creek Valley.
With the discovery of gold in western Montana in 1862, it became apparent that a direct route had to be opened from the east to allow freight and emigrants to reach the boomtown of Bannacktown. In the spring of 1864, Jim Bridger guided a wagon train from Fort Caspar through the Bighorn Basin to Virginia City avoiding the "Bozeman Trail" which crossed tribal lands east of the Bighorn Mountains. Approximately 2,500 people in wagon trains traveled the trail during 1864, with Bridger guiding a second wagon train over the 500-mile route in the fall.
After 1864, the route known as the Bridger Trail was only used occasionally due to the lack of water and grass. But the ruts and the man for whom it was named are indelible marks on the pages of frontier history.
NATIONAL
PUBLIC LANDS

IDAHO

BEAR RIVER MOUNTAIN Monday, August 21

- We came through two villages to-day; they are about five miles apart. The first Bennington, the last Montpelier Friday, at noon, August 18.

Tuesday, August 22.

- Here we are at Soda Springs. This is the junction of the Oregon and Montana roads.

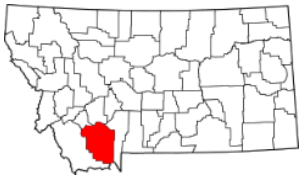
Saturday, August 27.

We came to Snake River ferry this morning

Monday, August 29.

- We have traveled to-day over Snake River desert

MONTANA



Saturday, September 3

- Are camping on the Sweet Water, about twenty-five miles from Virginia City.

Monday, September 5.

- Noon.—Here we are camping in the suburbs of the city, in Alder Gulch, gulch-mining

THE END OF OUR JOURNEY

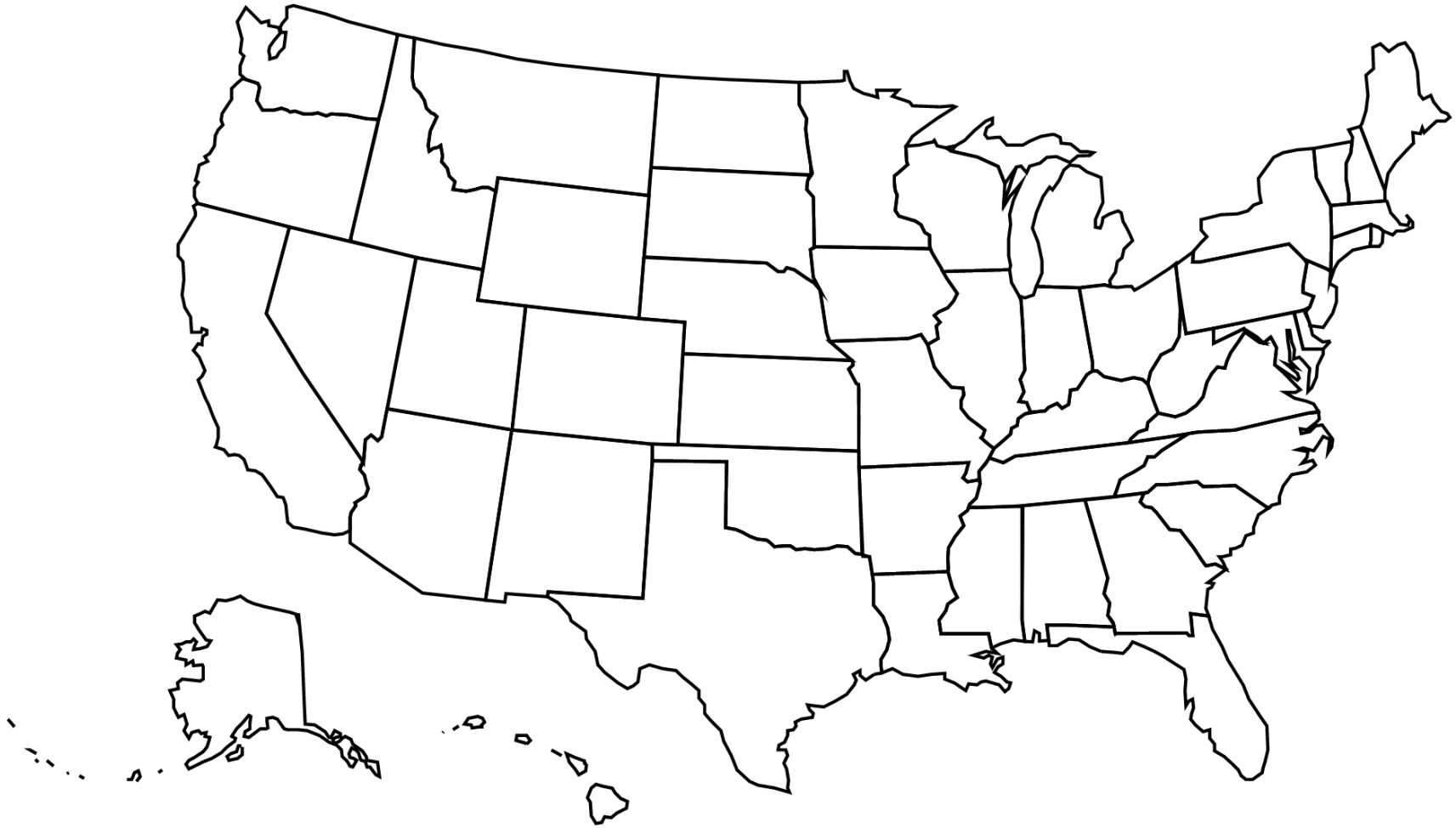
As they prepare to settle, Sarah writes, "The cabin is on the corner of Wallace and Hamilton Streets, next door to the city butcher. The cabin has a dirt roof. There is a floor in it, and that is better than some have. It is neat and clean, which is a comfort. Men have not bached in it.

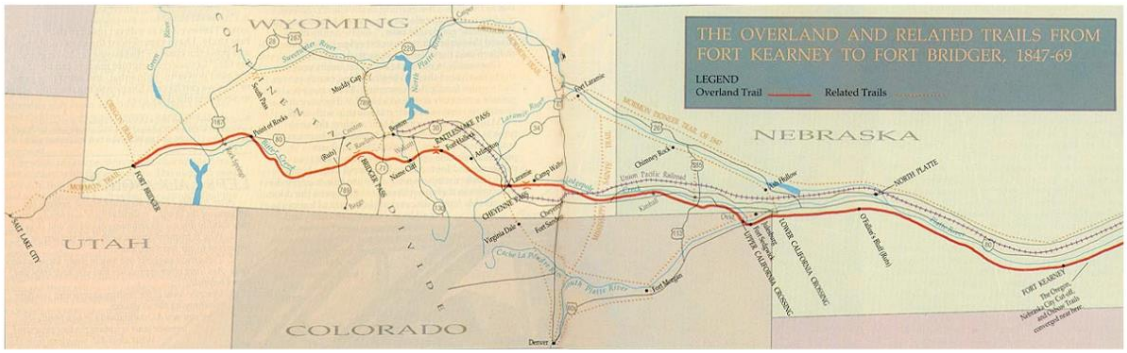
The boys found a checkerboard nailed on the window where a pane of glass was broken out. We pasted paper over the place. They made checkermen out of pasteboard."

Sarah's brother's house, as well as the family's log cabin, are now national historic landmarks, which you can visit. See Bonus Links for info.

The Montana Historical Society was founded in the Dance and Stuart Store, Virginia City, in 1865.
Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives

Plot Sarah's wagon train journey on this map.




THE OVERLAND AND RELATED TRAILS FROM FORT KEARNEY TO FORT BRIDGER, 1847-69
LEGEND
Overland Trail
Related Trails
WYOMING
NEBRASKA
UTAH
COLORADO
CONTINENTAL DIVIDE
FORT BRIDGER
SALT LAKE CITY
Muddy Gap
Rock Creek
Point of Rocks
Bridger Pass
Names Hill
Independence Rock
Devil's Gate
Sweetwater River
Fort Laramie
Chimney Rock
Ash Hollow
North Platte
Upper California Crossing
Lower California Crossing
O'Fallons Bluff (Buttes)
Fort Kearney
Denver
Fort Morgan
Cache La Poudre
South Platte River
Virginia Dale
Cheyenne
Fort Sanders
Green River
Oregon Trail
Mormon Trail
California Trail
Pony Express Route
Union Pacific Railroad
The Oregon, Nebraska City Cut-off and Upper Trails converged near here.

Footnotes

[i] Photo courtesy of Library of Congress http://www.loc.gov/item/73693406
[ii] Map courtesy of https://kids.kiddle.co/Image:Platterivermap.png

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