

Oregon Trail Journal of Sarah Wiseman

My first cousin twice removed (1874 - 1963)

Submitted by RICIGS member Jan McKenzie

Vistas were opening in our imagination of that land or country where was said, one could live easily and accomplish more, to which my father listened as did others.

Was such a long way, and to brave the hindering forces of the wild unfamiliar country and climate, it took courage to reach this promised land.

The untried trails (to us) was fascinating at first, the adventurous spirit was in us as were earlier pioneers, so leaving the old foot-hills covered with hazel, oak and ash in old Missouri, we loaded our wagons with just as few of the necessary things as we could carry, harnessed four horses to the wagon, Father, Mother and seven children started for our destination. The Willamette Valley of Oregon, March 2, 1882.

The first few nights we stopped over with relatives and friends that lived near the route we were to travel. I played with cousins around the old loom and spinning wheel. Cracked walnuts and hickory nuts on the old rock fire-place, for the last time. Very happy at the time, but a few days later we camped near the Osage River, which was out of its banks, raging muddy whirling stream. We could see trees, logs, chicken houses, one small house floating down stream. We saw one stream and water-wheel boat disappear, and we must cross it the next morning, on a new flat-boat without railings, taking on six teams and five the one way. They placed wagons on one side and teams facing the water, each driver holding them by the bits. My mother held one of our teams. How they did snort and stamp. I heard my dad say to mother, "If they start to jump, let them go, don't try to hold them."

I never seen my mother's face whiter, we children were in the wagon. Took some time to cross. Seemed ages. There was crowds of people on opposite banks watching, hardly expecting us to land. When we did, some men rushed to help the children and women off, while others helped to hook up teams to take wagons off. Our teams were the last ones to come off. After "goodbyes" were said we started on our way.

We were to meet with others that were waiting further on. We camped there a few days until they made ready to go. This was at Prairie City Mo. While waiting there we met a family that were to go with us but sickness overtook them and they parted with the mother and one son with two sons very sick. So did not come with us. We never hear of them again.

It wasn't so bad at first - - a new country and new scenery, "dugouts" and sod houses, plenty fuel and food one could get. Later on we had to watch for both. Once while walking, I saw a stick of wood and picked it up carried it for miles. I think I walked half the way across the plains (with others of course). Start early and walk until noon, get a rest and then we would go till sunset. Next day same old routine.

We had the two teams to drive, one day long before we reached the Indians, my dad was resting in the back of the wagon. Sister and I each had two lines, was driving our gentle horses. They walked along to suit themselves, and our scout came loping by, rushed to the lead horses, took them by the bits and turned them another way. After getting farther around we looked to see why he did this and saw a underground tunnel or a washout. If we should have gone a little way farther would all have broken through and piled up---horses wagon and all.

We was fortunate in having a good scout, who was only just a boy of 19 summers, his name was Sam Mackey.

Soon after this my father traded the four horses for a team of mules. We hated to part with our familiar teams but soon liked the mules as well. They took us through some very dangerous places, swam then rivers when we thought the wagon box would float off the running gear. Sometimes when trying to get them to enter the river, they refused to go. There was quicksand and they knew it. Seemed to know more than the driver.

Soon they organized the caravan, or train and my dad was made Captain. The signal to stop were these words, "ho, Ho, Ho Up" till went down the line and all has stopped.

Sometimes it was to hold a consultation as to which trail to take, to talk over danger from Indians in case of an attack. Some we could see in the distance ahead of us.

On the back of each wagon was what we called a feed box, in which to feed the horses grain. We children would climb into this and ride away which was very dangerous, owing to the next wagon tongue sticking us. Sister and I thought we could hold on to this box and swing across an Alkalie mud-hole - not knowing how deep it may be. So over we went, the wheels sank deep and so did we. We resembled somewhat a tadpole coming out of it. We had our defeats as well as victories.

One night when making camp, (it seemed so far from habitation) we saw a yearling calf which had given out in the drive, and left behind. (They drove cattle to market then, railroad not yet connected). And on the hillside above it saw a big grizzly bear watching the calf. He had his forelegs or arms across his chest so independently. Sam, our scout, took a shot at him, just raised a dust in front of him. Then the old fellow lowered himself and went waddling away. Next morning there was no calf or any sign of Mr. Grizzly. We children slept as well that night as any other, having so many men in camp we felt safe. We seldom shot a gun unless we were far from any Indians. One day our scout scared up a deer and shot it, took his shoelaces and tied it's feet together so as to put it on his horse, but Mr. Horse wouldn't carry it. So, he left it behind and came in to camp for another horse that was not afraid of it. He, with some other of the men went to get it. How the men teased Sam, saying he was afraid it would run away, so tied it's feet.

One Morning we broke camp, and started on, one fellows team started to run away. The man caught the one line and held on, jumped for the wagon tongue and missed, threw him under the wagon and fell. The horses ran in a circle. Two little tots (Arthur and Pete) standing up in front of the wagon, smoke rolling out stovepipe, mother on the ground screaming while the team ran themselves down. No one was hurt but all badly scared. This man was our scout's brother, Henry.

A few days later his sister was run over by her father's (James Mackey) wagon. She tried to jump from the wagon and her clothes caught on the wagon brake, threw her under the back wheels. We thought her killed, but she soon revived. (Paralee) This taught us children never to jump from the wagon when in motion.

There was a bride and groom in our caravan on their honeymoon trip - - much more like a "honey-moan" to me.

Once we were warned of a bunch or band of cougars in a canyon and of some bad Indians near there - - so all guarded the teams and tents that night. Our tent was occupied with three families. No one undressed, glad to drop down any place to rest. Father and Sam guarded our tent while the three men watched the teams. I lay near the tent flap. Sam sat on the tent pole. We both heard a little rustle of a noise. I raised up - - Sam crept away on hands and knees. After a short while he returned. I whispered "What was it Sam" - - he said "dog" but there was only three dogs in the outfit. One was a tiny thing that never left the wagon (belonged to a fat lady in fourth wagon in line) and we had a shepard which was in the tent with us, a greyhound that wrapped himself around and lay under the wagon and never left it till we broke camp. So it was not dog - but could have been an Indian scouting around and would soon

return with others to get our scalps. So as soon as it was light enough to harness the horses we were moving along-not stopping for breakfast which we didn't get until noon that day.

By a promise to work on the railroad which wasn't connected at that time, we all got three days ride on the railroad in box cars which went like the hop of a jack rabbit, "a hop and a stop." Traveled so slow at times I could have ran as fast - - road narrow and rough.

A man by the name of Aumstead was the Engineer. Drive first train across the plains and I was on it. At the end of the ride we found the road nearly completed so they let us pass on our way without work or pay.

In our wagon we carried a small sheetiron stove with buffalo grass and chips. We could have a quick fire to have hot coffee which all tried to make at one time. We never made a fire when near Indian camps if we knew it. Often drove miles in roundabout ways over hills or washouts to get by them. We saw many "teepee" towns of Indians that did not see us. Sometimes we could hear their tums tums. So glad they did not see us. One day, while about twenty of us were walking we were surrounded by wild cattle. We were on a railroad bridge over a high incline. The teams were driven as close to us as they could be and Sam on his horse tried to get between them and us as they ran down this incline. We ran for the wagons, not stopping for cactus thorns, I being barefoot picked up plenty.

When we felt it was safe to shoot a gun, we had antelope or deer making quite a change from the regular bacon, but it did not take a second call to get us there to eat even bacon with sand gritting in our teeth all the time, too hungry and tired to care. Water was so scarce in some places we had to buy it and haul it along for days at a time. Then the Indians would come and for fear of them we would let them drink it.

Many sacrifices and peril we encountered and many sad sights, graves besides the road with no marker except a rock placed by loved ones who had to pass on leaving them in the lonesome looking wilds of sage and sand. At night they made a corral for the teams, putting the tongue of each wagon under the back of the one ahead, always in a circle. Once we traveled all the night to get away from the Indians. Two of them, one at each side of our wagon, had ridden along with us for the day. One had a headdress of feathers. I suppose by that he was a big chief of some tribe. Anyhow they kept us guessing how to get away from them without trouble. They left us when they thought we were going to make camp. Night was on and I was tired and sleepy. I just would go to sleep. Mother would shake me each time. Saying,

"wake up, you don't know how soon you may have to run for your life." I was just a child, yet I remember enough sights and scares to make one shiver even now.

Altogether there was thirty covered wagons in the caravan. Of course, my father being in the lead ran into danger first, whether Indians, quick-sand or wild cattle or whatever.

We were almost five months coming over but we came much faster than they of the old schooner and ox teams. Some travelers we passed enroute. Most of the families stopped at Weiser. Just five wagons crossed the mountains into the Willamette Valley, our wagon, Mr. Mackey's and Mr. Bob Schockley's.

We encountered very deep snow in the mountains and our team gave out after breaking through the snow so often so we left our wagon and of the Mackeys lead our team out. Later the Mackey boys went back to get them. This was on the McKenzie route.

When we reached the top of the mountain where there was sunshine and no snow we children with some of the grownups lay down to rest. I remember seeing a big brown bear near by. I had seen much worse sights so didn't trouble me any. I just went off to sleep right after those long days and weeks with tired and weary bodies. We came into the Willamette Valley where mother said money ought to grow on trees.

Sarah J. Wiseman Seely
Caldwell, Idaho