

ON TO CALIFORNIA IN THE GOLD RUSH DAYS OF '59

INTERESTING DIARY OF THE LATE JAMES WILLIAMSON
COVERING 124 DAYS' JOURNEY OVERLAND TO THE
GOLDEN STATE IN THE SPRING OF '59

April 5th, Monday 1st. day:—At about half past 7 o'clock a. m., took farewell of my father and mother, brothers and sister and other relations and then started on journey to California. A very snowy day, there fell between four and six inches of snow until we reached Port Sarnia, could not get across the river to-night. We then put up in W. G. Harkness' Hotel for the night and made preparations for leaving Sarnia in the morning.

April 6th, Tuesday, 2nd. day:—Everything being ready we started about half past twelve p. m., went on board the Donerport steamer for Mount Clemens, ran around in the flats where we remained for about an hour and a half; got clear and started, but got fast in the ice and remained until morning.

April 7th, Wednesday, 3rd. day:—This morning we got clear a little after sunrise. John Thompson paid \$17.00 for our freight, 7 people, 9 horses and 2 wagons. I paid T. T. \$2.50, being our equal share. When we got our horses off at Mount Clemens, we started for Detroit. Took our horses and wagons to the depot, put in the wagons, took our horses to the Commercial and put up for the night. Our bill in the morning cost considerable.

April 8th, Thursday, 4th day:—Got our horses to the depot and started from Detroit between 7 and 8 o'clock a. m. Saw James Harrower at the depot. Came 107 miles, got supper and slept in the cars. Stopped at the following places to take in wood and water: Ypsilanti, Anhar, Bor, Delhie, Dexter, Chelsea, Grass Lake, Jexon, Albion, Marshal, here we came at dark.

April 9th, Friday, 5th. day:—Started at daybreak this morning, came to Battle Creek, then to Gillsburgh, Kalamazoo, Pontiac, Kiles, New Buffalo, then to Michigan City, where we stopped all night. Got our supper and slept in the cars.

April 10th, Saturday, 6th day:—Started this morning between 7 and 8 o'clock a. m. and got to the west end of the railroad train about 1 o'clock p. m. Here we took off our horses, etc., fitted up our wagons, harnessed our horses and drove 20 miles tonight. It rained a little the most of the way. After we put up our horses, rain came on heavier and rained considerable. The road that we came over this evening was dry, being oak openings and small prairies of very light soil.

April 11th, Sunday, 7th. day:—This day being Sunday, we stopped travelling on our journey and went in three miles to Chicago. R.R., R.W. G. F. and myself went to church. The Presbyterian minister of that church gave an excellent discourse from Romans, 3rd chapter and 28th verse. "Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law." Returned to our lodgings again. Mathew McCormick came up to us this evening.

April 12th, Monday, 8th day:—This morning we drove in to Chicago and stopped about 2 hours, started for Peru, drove 16 miles to Brush Hill on a plank road, paid 50 cents toll. Stopped here and fed the horses off the prairies. Between this and Naperville was the best grass we had seen. We stopped at Naperville tonight, drove about 30 miles today. It was nearly all plank. Our toll was 85 cents.

April 13th, Tuesday, 9th. day:—This day we started from Naperville about 8 o'clock, put on only one span at once and changed alternately. The roads were muddy, stopped at Oswego to feed. Here I mailed a letter for Henry M. Joans, California. This day was the first we saw any person sowing seed. Stopped at Newark for the night, came 28 miles today.

April 14th, Wednesday, 10th day:—This day we found the roads very muddy. We came to Otavia this day, travelled about 20 miles, put up in the Mansion House.

April 15th, Thursday, 11th day:—Left Otavia and came to Peru, on our way we saw some men working at a coal mine, went on board the Hibernia this evening and started for St. Louis.

April 16th, Friday, 12th. day:—This morning we came to Peoria at daybreak, stopped until 8 o'clock. We paid five dollars and seventy-five cents from here to St. Louis. We had rain from about 6 o'clock until about noon. The Illinois River now was very high. A number of their houses along the flats were surrounded with water, and the inmates were there until the water fell.

April 17th, Saturday, 13th day:—We came to St. Louis this day about 12 o'clock. After we came into the Mississippi, the water looked very dirty, it had the appearance of dirty soap suds. This day the trees along the river were looking quite green. We got horses and wagons off the Hibernia and put them on board the Sonora and took our horses to a stable as the vessel was not to sail until Tuesday for Port Leavenworth.

April 18th, Sunday, 14th. day:—Sunday, went to church in the forenoon. There could not be less than day than 50 or 60 steamboats at Harbor. There were no wharfs any place all the way down from Peru to St. Louis.

April 19th, Monday, 15th. day:—This day we bought all the necessary articles we needed for our outfit. The markets here were not so high as we expected. We bought the following articles which along with what we brought from home, we thought was enough:—

Rice 200 lbs.	\$19.45
Hard bread, 200 lbs.	10.75
Water cask	1.50
8 small casks	2.00
25 lbs. sugar	1.90
2 bottles (??)	.80
12 lbs. tea	9.00
14 lbs. dried apples	2.25
115 lbs. pork	11.50
10 lbs. salt	.15
5 lbs. cream tartar	1.50
100 lbs. flour	2.80
1 qt. castor oil	.40
4 bottles painkiller	.90
4 boxes pills	.90
6 1/2 lbs. powder	2.00
4 lbs. buckwheat	.40
6 lbs. shot	.38
8 lbs. lead	.40
1 gal. vinegar	.30
4 bars soap	1.00
2 dozen boxes matches	.20
1 box yeast	.25
carriage	6.20
1 1/2 gal. brandy	.42
1 1/2 lbs. rope	.42
1 doz. lemons	.30
Total	\$69.25

April 20th, Tuesday, 16th day:—We did not leave St. Louis until 12 o'clock today. We came up the Mississippi River until we came to the Missouri, then up this river for Fort Leavenworth.

April 21st, Wednesday, 17th. day:—This day we found it some colder. We stopped at Washington for wood. During the night a horse jumped over board, the man who owned the horse was a stranger to me.

April 22nd, Thursday, 18th day:—This day was the warmest we had since we started. Came to Jefferson City. There is a penitentiary in this place.

April 23rd, Friday, 19th. day:—This day we had a small shower of rain in the forenoon, very slow sailing.

April 24th, Saturday, 20th. day:—This day it rained some, stopped at Lexington, considerable lightning this evening.

April 25th, Sunday, 21st. day:—This day Sunday stopped at Independence to unship freight.

April 26th, Monday, 22nd. day:—This day we came to Fort Leavenworth, unshipped our horses and wagons, etc., and drove to Salt Creek where we stopped for the night. We were the first Canadian emigrants that were permitted to land at this Fort this year, the reason they are not permitting is for fear of sickness.

April 27th, Tuesday, 23rd. day:—This morning Richard Richardson and R. Williamson went in to the Fort to buy some corn. Had to go to Weston, got some Indian meal. Tried to get the tires of our wagon set to-day but the blacksmith at the Fort had no time.

April 28th, Wednesday, 24th. day:—This day we left Salt Creek about 11 o'clock a. m., and travelled about 15 miles over some beautiful prairies and stopped at a small stream of water for the night. Grass scarce.

April 29th, Thursday, 25th day:—Started at about 7 o'clock, a cool day, nice breeze. Wagon tires being loose gave us some trouble. Stopped at a small stream for the night.

April 30th, Friday, 26th. day:—This morning a little before day break it calmed a little but when we started it got so high (the wind) that sometimes we could not face the road with the dust. Stopped at a place where we got the best grass

since we started.

May 1st, Saturday, 27th. day:—This morning the mosquitos made their appearance for the first. Crossed several small streams of water to-day. Stopped at a place for the night where we got good grass, wood and water.

May 2nd, Sunday, 28th. day:—This morning before daylight we had thunder and lightning with a small shower of rain. Had fish for breakfast that we caught the evening before with the hook. A very warm day the trees that were along this stream were principally black walnut; the nuts of which were here in abundance and perfectly sound and good to eat. Saw some turkeys here, got ten of these eggs. In the evening lightning and thunder and another small shower of rain. Stopped here until Monday.

May 3rd, Monday, 29th. day:—This day came about 20 miles. Came to the junction of the St. Joseph and Fort Leavenworth roads, crossed a small stream called Elm Creek. At this place between three and four hundred head of cattle, principally, mules and horses. This creek was the worst spot we met with since we left the Fort.

May 4th, Tuesday, 30th. day:—This day we came to a river called the Big Blue, we forded it, wagon wheels over the front axels. There is a store here, stopped on the brink for the night. Saw a man this day with a hand cart on this way to California.

May 5th, Wednesday, 31st. day:—Started this morning very early, the roads wet and slippery. In the evening there came on a heavy rain with high wind, thunder and lightning, we were all wet. Had a good glass of brandy that helped to revive the whole party. Had no fire, nor wood to make a fire. Our wagon was on dry ground when we stopped, and before half an hour, the water flowed round the wagon wheels 1 1/2 feet, and was nearly dry before we went to bed.

May 6th, Thursday, 32nd. day:—Started this morning without breakfast, travelled until we came to a creek called the Little Sandy, got breakfast, dried our clothes and remained until the next morning.

May 7th, Friday, 33rd. day:—Crossed the Sandy this morning, there is a blacksmith shop at this creek. Saw four men with two hand carts and another with a wheel barrow on their way to California. In the forenoon today, Hely's wagon axle broke, and we went to work and soon made a new one. There is a creek where it broke down, and we remained here all night. There were six mules stolen by the Indians about half a mile from this place this night just at dark.

May 8th, Saturday, 34th. day:—This morning it rained until about 10 o'clock with thunder, lightning, and high wind. Came to the Big Sandy. Crossed it and another small stream, stopped about 3 miles east of the Little Blue and remained until Monday.

May 9th, Sunday, 35th. day:—Rested our horses this day, had tolerable good grass. Saw a good number of wolves this evening.

May 10th, Monday, 36th. day:—Came to the Little Blue to-day, travelled about 7 miles up it. Rained very heavy in the forenoon.

May 11th, Tuesday, 37th day's journey:—The beaten track this day was a little heavy wheeling, got good grass for our horses this evening.

May 12, Wednesday, 38th day:—This morning before we started, a man passed by with a wheel barrow on his way to California. Rain came about noon and rained for about an hour.

May 13th, Thursday, 39th. day:—Travelled about 2 or 3 miles this morning to Dry Creek, one of Healy's teams crossed it first, water over the wagon bottom, the other horse with the cart crossed next, wet the barrels of hard bread a little, the two horses cart crossed next, one of the horses fell and was mostly covered with water, got the rice, sugar, coffee and almost everything wet in the cart during this time, which was not over 20 minutes in which the water rose as much as a foot and a half. Had a heavy shower of rain in the forenoon, and by this time it was impossible to ford it. We stopped until the middle of the afternoon and got our stuff across on a wagon box and swam our horses. The man that owned this box took seven wagon loads over on his own and would take nothing for his trouble. The box was made purposely for ferrying. Drove about 2 miles and stopped for the night, good grass but no water that was good.

May 14th, Friday, 40th. day:—Saw a good many antelope this day, roads soft, came to the Platte River this day about noon, travelled up it 14 miles, camped 3 miles down the river from Port Kearney, no person is allowed to camp within a mile of this port all round.

May 15th, Saturday, 41st. day:—We got the best grass here since we started. A heavy shower of rain this morning, thunder and lightning. Took our wagon up to the fort and got some of the harness mended at the blacksmith shop. Came back, loaded our wagon and rested until Monday. This evening high wind and very cool.

May 16th, Sunday, 42nd. day:—The wind very high this morning, some few grains of snow, wind continued high all day, fell in the evening.

May 17th, Monday, 43rd. day:—This morning there was frost, good roads after we passed the fort, grass scarce.

May 18th, Tuesday, 44th. day:—This day we had the most level roads since we started, very little grass.

May 19th, Wednesday, 45th. day:—Frost this morning. Along the whole road here, it seemed quite destitute of grass, cooked our breakfast with buffalo dung, no timber here that was within reach.

May 20th, Thursday, 46th. day:—This day we saw a buffalo, the first I ever saw. Rained in the afternoon, camped where we got good grass, no wood.

May 21st, Friday, 47th. day:—Rained some this morning. I saw one live buffalo and seven dead ones upon the bluffs, rained a little until noon. Scarcity of grass this day, struck off the Platte this day.

May 22nd, Saturday, 48th. day:—Saw a great many wolves strolling over the prairies.

May 23rd, Sunday, 49th. day:—Rested our horses this day and got good grass for them on the Islands in the Platte River. This evening we were mostly all in bed but the watchman. Something made a noise in the river that frightened our horses, we thought it was the Indians but were not sure. We were soon up and to our arms, nothing more disturbed us until morning.

May 24th, Monday, 50th day:—This day we crossed the south fork of the Platte River about half past one o'clock p. m. It was shallow and I think it is over a quarter of a mile wide, sandy bottom from a foot and a half to two feet deep. Camped at a place where we had little grass and no water. Lightning this evening.

May 25th, Tuesday, 51st. day:—This morning we came to Ash Hollow, a difficult hill down to it, came three miles to the north fork of the Platte down the hollow.

May 26th, Wednesday, 52nd. day:—The road this day was sandy, heavy wheeling, washed some shirts this evening, the first I ever washed.

May 27th, Thursday, 53rd. day:—Crossed a small stream of water this morning, there were fish in it, caught some. Passed Courthouse or Solitary Tower this day. Got our horse shod this evening by a blacksmith that was travelling along the road, paid 20 cents a shoe for nailing them on.

May 28th, Friday, 54th. day:—Passed Chimney Rock this day; it is on the left hand, and Scots Bluffs on the right hand. There were some trading wagons here when we passed. Stopped at a spring of good water, got good grass and plenty of wood.

May 29th, Saturday, 55th. day:—Got the remainder of our horses shod this morning, had a shower of rain in the evening with thunder and lightning.

May 30th, Sunday, 56th. day:—Rested our horses this day, good water and tolerable grass.

May 31st, Monday, 57th. day:—This day we passed a trading post, roads good, grass a little scarce.

June 1st, Tuesday, 58th. day:—This day we crossed Saramic River. There is a bridge over this stream. Paid \$2 for our team and wagon. Fort Saramic is about a mile up this stream, our wagon tires were loose here, and we got them set. Paid \$6 for the four tires. We bought 100 lbs of flour at the Fort, paid \$10 for it. We could be supplied here with most of what we wanted. Left for Saramic this evening and drove out a little and camped. Rained some this evening, thunder and lightning. Mailed a letter at this fort for my father.

June 2nd, Wednesday, 59th day's journey:—We found the road more hilly than we had met with yet. Stopped at a small creek this evening had a heavy rain with thunder and lightning. Tolerable grass.

June 3rd, Thursday, 60th day's journey:—This day we found the roads hilly. These are what are called the Black Hills, crossed several small streams of water, some of the streams though small, we saw evidence that they had risen to the height of seven or eight feet, with last night's rain, and when we crossed this morning, they were nearly dry. Thundered this afternoon. Crossed Horse Shoe Creek; the grass is good here. Camped near the Platte River, had good grass.

June 4th, Friday, the 61st day's journey:—The roads this day were still hilly. We crossed the Labonte

river this evening. Some miles before we crossed this river a road came in from among the hills, said to be 20 miles the nearest it left the Platte at the fort. We came to what is called the river road, though it leaves the river some times ten or fifteen miles at a stretch.

June 5th, Saturday, 62nd day's journey:—Crossed several small streams of water this day. This morning we travelled over several miles of the road. The clay here is quite red. Thunder and lightning this day, with a shower of hailstones. We had no water this evening.

June 6th, Sunday, 63rd day's journey:—This morning we travelled two or three miles to water and grass then stopped the remainder of the day to rest. We stopped on a creek called Spring Branch. There was considerable water running down this stream, a great deal of wild sage here, got tolerable grass.

June 7th, Monday, 64th day's journey:—After getting through the Black Hills we came to the Platte, this morning. Crossed Big Deer Creek, considerable cotton wood timber here. The largest I saw for some time. Considerable water in this stream. Black Hills is covered with pine of a stunted size, this gives them a black appearance, from which they get their name. Saramic Creek is among these hills. We could see it 100 miles before we came opposite it. It is a good distance from the road, its height is 6,500 feet above the sea. This day some men passed us that were packing. They had left St. Joseph's on the 16th of May; told us they had passed 4000 wagons since they started. They said the Small Pox was prevalent in the race of the emigration. Crossed a crooked muddy creek, camped on the Platte.

June 8th, Tuesday, 65th day's journey:—Came to the Upper or Mormon ferry this morning. There were between 50 and 100 wagons waiting to get across. There was snow on the high bluffs on the south side of the north fork. This place we got our horses and wagons across at sunset, paid \$5 for each wagon and 50 cents for each horse and 50 cents for each man. The current carries the boats across without rowing or hauling with rafts. There is a rope fixed across the stream, to which the boat is attached. The river is over 160 yards at this place. There was a bridge about 20 miles below this point, but was swept away, I was told that the Mormons built it and collected toll. They own the Upper Ferry.

June 9th, Wednesday, 66th day's journey:—Left the Platte River this morning early. We do not travel any more on it. Crossed Rattle Snake hill, came to a small stream, said to be poisonous on account of the alkali in the water—still further on is another stream of alkali, this place had a disagreeable smell—the alkali or saleratus in this place is in spots lying on the ground as white as snow. 20 miles from the Platte is Willow Springs, the first good water since leaving the river. There is very little grass in this district. Came to Sage Spring Creek, got plenty of good grass, drove 25 or 26 miles this day.

June 10th, Thursday, 67th day's journey:—This day we passed some lakes of alkali water, one of which was near Sweet Water River. The saleratus here was lying along the edge in great abundance. It is said that it is nearly as good for cooking purposes as the states manufacture. Camped at Sweet Water River this evening, had heavy sand this day, rained some in the afternoon. We threw away some of our clothing this evening to lighten our load.

June 11th, Friday 68th day's journey:—Passed Independence Rock this morning. A little before we came to the ford we got our wagon across on a raft, paid \$2 for it, and forded it with our horses. Stopped to feed at noon near the Devils Gate, a gap in the granite road through which the Sweet Water Creek passes, the passage through the gap is about 50 rods the perpendicular walls on each side are over 100 feet apart and 400 feet high. It is a curious looking place, there is a considerable fall in the river here. Crossed three or four small streams this afternoon, apparently running from the snow covered mountains which are along here. These are what are called Sweet Water Mountains. There is considerable alkali along here in places. This afternoon the wind blew so high that it raised the dust and even small gravel stones so that they would smart any place they would strike.

June 12th, Saturday, 69th day's journey:—This day there were some of the roads sandy, and we had heavy wheeling. We came to within a mile of the next ford and stopped for the night, found good grass on Sweet Water River. We crossed several small streams this day.

June 13th, Sunday, 70th day's journey:—We rested our horses this day on the Sweet Water River. A great many teams passed this day, had good grass.

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