

## Commentary... Of a certain age...

By Sue Stafford  
Columnist

On April 2, 1852, the family of my great-great grandfather John Tucker Scott, age 43, his wife, Ann Roelofson Scott, age 40, and their nine living children bid farewell to their farm, family, and friends in Groveland township, Tazewell County, Illinois, to travel several thousand miles on the Oregon Trail to settle in the Willamette Valley near Lafayette.

Along the way, Ann would succumb to cholera and be buried 30 miles west of Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Also lost on the trail was their youngest child, Willie, who died at age 4 and was buried in the Burnt River Valley in present-day Baker County, Oregon.

One hundred sixty-five years later, I am going to be tracing a portion of their journey between Ash Hollow, Nebraska and Vale, Oregon. Next Monday, July 31, I will be leaving with a Sisters friend whose ancestors joined the migration to Oregon in 1845, to see the wagon ruts, visit the

museums and monuments, and experience the landscape encountered by our ancestors.

Our prairie schooner, however, is a 19-foot Pleasureway camper van with air conditioning, solar panels, refrigeration, a full bathroom, and TV. We will have cell phones and the Internet, plenty of water and food, and no fear of attacks from disease, wild animals, or indigenous natives.

Besides maps and GPS, we have the journals of our ancestors, in which they faithfully recorded the happenings of each day on the trail and the routes they followed to Oregon.

Tucker Scott assigned each of his older children specific duties for the trip west. Abigail Jane (Jenny), age 17, was selected to be the principal author of the family's journal, with additions by 15-year-old Margaret and occasionally Tucker himself. Abigail had attended part of a year at an academy, plus country schooling, and had a background of family reading.

Abigail's journal was an eight- by 12-inch blank

book, bound with paper-covered boards and a brown leather spine. At the end of the journal is Tucker's record of his income and expenses for the trip. The journal has been quoted numerous times in books written about the Oregon Trail. Abigail used it for two of her later novels, "Captain Grey's Company" (1859) and "From the West to the West: Across the Plains to Oregon" (1905).

Abigail married Ben Duniway after arriving in Oregon and became the Pacific Northwest leader in the women's suffrage movement for 41 years. She was a teacher, farmer's wife, poet, novelist, milliner, lecturer, and editor of the *New Northwest* newspaper in Portland.

Abigail's younger brother and my great-great grandfather, Harvey W. Scott, was the editor of *The Oregonian* for 40 years, and often disagreed with many of Abigail's ideas. Harvey was 14 when the family came to Oregon. He shared in driving the wagon in which his

mother and his two youngest siblings, Sarah Maria and William Neill, rode, until it was abandoned. He fought in the Yakima Indian War of 1855 and was the first graduate of Pacific University in Forest Grove.

There were five Scott covered wagons, 16 Scott yokes, or 32 oxen, used on the wagons, 10 extra oxen belonging to a Scott cousin, three cows, two horses, and a pony. The provision wagon was pulled by five yoke of oxen (10), the camp equipage wagon was drawn by three yoke of oxen. There was the family wagon, the "Mother's Wagon" for Ann and her two youngest children, and the miscellaneous wagon, all pulled by oxen.

Along the way others joined them in several Missouri locations. At St. Joseph, Missouri, on May 10, they were joined by a party of men from Groveland who had accompanied provisions sent ahead by Tucker to be loaded in the wagons before crossing the Missouri River by ferry.

By the time they reached Fort Kearney on the banks of the Platte River, on May 28, Tucker wrote to his father James who stayed behind in Illinois, "We now have in our train 12 waggons 113 head of oxen & 12 head of horses." There were 52 people altogether.

Illness of many varieties visited the wagon train, some fatal, and passing the graves along the trail was a daily occurrence. They started out resting on Sunday when possible and didn't travel on the Sabbath, until they reached the plains where they needed to keep moving. They usually covered between 12 and 25 miles a day, depending on conditions. Snow, rain, mud, then dust were constant companions, and the search for good water ("Adam's ale") and grass, as well as fuel (wood or buffalo chips) was continual. In June, it began to get hot and they experienced summer storms with rain, thunder, lightning, and wind.

See CERTAIN AGE on page 20

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