

THE HISTORY OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN SOCIETY OF THE PUGET SOUND AT THE 35TH REUNION

AN ACCOUNT OF CROSSING THE PLAINS IN '53, AND THE FIRST TRIP VIA NATCHESS PASS

FELLOW-PIONEERS. Ladies and Gentlemen: For the thirty-fifth time we have assembled for the purpose of holding our annual reunion, and at no period in our past history as pioneers have the members of our Nation on our state and its beautiful coast been more suspicious than at the present moment. But time must not be taken to review these conditions now. For the twentieth time we find ourselves in this city in response to the most cordial standing invitation which has been extended to us by those who think that there is "nothing too good for pioneers." And I am sure that I voice the sentiments of all present when I say that "this is the best of times for the people of Portland," particularly the pioneer ladies and their numerous friends.

Before proceeding with my address I hope you will pardon me for indulging in a little reminiscence. There is a gentleman in this city, and I expect he is in this audience, who was born in the year just sixty years ago. He was at church there one Sunday, and after the service the minister said to him: "Chauncey, there is a little fellow here, named George, the river fourteen or fifteen miles, called Portland, and I wish you would take my horse and ride down there tomorrow morning, look after an old man named Chauncey, and see if you can find out just what he is doing. If you think it advisable, make an appointment for me to reach there two weeks from today."

Accordingly, "Chauncey," who is Rev. C. O. Hosford, of this city, a pioneer of 1848, now in his 88th year, rode to a point on the east side of the river opposite this settlement, and conveyed to me by the stream by "Uncle" Jimmy Stephens in an Indian canoe, and landed at what is now the foot of Stark street. Ascending the bank, he entered a large, well-kept mill, and he says he never saw anything finer since. Looking southward he saw an opening in the woods, and went to it, crawling under and climbing over logs. There he found scattered about fourteen log cabins and a number of families, among them the families of the late Terwilliger and McNamee, names familiar to us all. Representatives of the two last-named families are at this reunion today, and one of the latter is Mrs. Charlotte Terwilliger Hartwright, who has been chairman of the Woman's Auxiliary for a number of years, and who is recognized as one of the most devoted among pioneers. After the service called upon every person, asked permission to read the Scriptures and offer prayer, and finding that a religious service would be of benefit to the pointment for Rev. William Roberts, superintendent of the Methodist Mission on the Pacific Coast, to preach on the second Sunday following, and that was the first religious service in Portland.

What the Journey Meant. In these latter days the experiences that were encountered by those who "crossed the plains" can hardly be understood. Even to many of those who made the arduous journey the events of the trip, when reviewed from the distance, now seem like a series of dreams.

Especially is this true when the wonderful development in transportation facilities during the past few years is taken into account. Then, indeed, the pioneer says to himself, "Did I really cross the plains? Can it be true that it took six months to cross the continent to the Mississippi River to Oregon?" But when it is remembered that to "cross the plains" even as late as 1859, and for a time afterwards, seemed like a series of dreams.

To leave home, friends, society and all the surroundings and influences the human race has had to endure, and to face a strong probability that the separation would be final; to provide teams and provisions for a continuous journey of five or six months, and to travel a distance of more than 3000 miles, through an uninhabited region, occupied by wild beasts, and to be subject to the loss of protection other than that afforded by the immigrants traveling together in order to render mutual assistance in any emergency, and to be subject to the loss of teams by stampeding, poisonous water, poisonous food, and theft by Indians; to the endangering of lives of women and children by the crossing of the mountains, and to the suffering from thirst entailed by many weary miles of travel through a barren atmosphere over burning sands; to endure all these hardships, and to be more; the whole combining to tax the powers of human endurance to the utmost, then a faint idea may be formed of the experience that awaited the pioneer on the Oregon trail.

Motives That Prompted Settlement. It has been my privilege, as well as duty, to interview thousands of pioneers since I was first elected secretary of this association, 22 years ago, and one question invariably asked is this, "What induced you to come to Oregon?" In general the reply can be summed up in a sentence or two, "We came to better our condition; we came on account of health." And in so doing the pioneers have saved the "Oregon Country" to the nation.

In the earlier days of the life of this association it was the rule that the speaker should confine himself to giving an account of the immigration of some one year; hence, since I crossed the plains in 1853, what I have to say will relate mainly to events of that year in connection with the company of which my father's family was a part, particular reference being made to the latter part of the journey.

In order to show how my father first became interested in Oregon, I may state that in 1838-9 he heard Rev. Samuel Parker, of Ithaca, N. Y., lecture on Oregon in Troy, Bradford County, Pa. In this he became deeply interested. A little later these lectures were printed in book form and quite widely circulated. One of these books was secured by him and read with great care. As a result, he determined to go to Ore-

gon as soon as he could. Not until 1846, however, was he ready to begin the Westward march. He then had a wife and one child—myself. He went to Illinois that year, expecting to resume the onward journey in 1847, but sickness intervened and prevented him from doing so. After recovery, he temporarily gave up the idea of going to Oregon, and made a home in Stark County, Illinois, and established himself in the shoemaking business. As time passed, however, he decided that he never would be satisfied to remain permanently in Illinois, and accordingly began planning to start across the continent in 1848. In connection with these plans he consulted with a number of persons from the vicinity of Monmouth, Warren County, among them Rev. John E. Murphy, William Murphy, his cousin, Albert W. and Thomas Lucas, Ira F. M. Butler and a Mr. Roundtree—all members of the Christian Church—and the feasibility of establishing a college in Oregon was suggested and often discussed. The first personal recollection I have of Oregon was in connection with hearing that embryo college talked of by these men. A large Mitchell's atlas lay open on the table in our house, and the route to Oregon was marked out. Ere long a map was made to Dr. Parker's book in order to clear up some point relating to the feasibility of the Western trip and the location of the college. The plan for establishing the college, in brief, was this: That all who joined this party should reside in Oregon, and a donation land claim as nearly together as possible, and then set aside a certain number of acres to be reserved for the location of an academy. The entire party taking part in these discussions, with the exception of our family—my father being unable to close up his business matters to go to Oregon—agreed to go to Oregon in 1852 and settled at or near what is now Monmouth, Polk County, the name "Monmouth" being given to the settlement in honor of Monmouth, N. J. The arrangement to set aside a certain portion of land for college purposes, as above alluded to, was substantially carried out in 1852, and a school was opened at Monmouth a year or two later, which, in process of time, has become the present State Normal School at that place.

Rev. Samuel Parker. Since Rev. Samuel Parker has been referred to, it is proper that a brief statement should be made concerning him in connection with Dr. Marcus Whitman, who started west in 1838, for the purpose of investigating the question of establishing missions among the Oregon Indians. Upon reaching Green River, Park and Whitman met and accompanied the party of Flathead and Nez Percé Indians, and were so impressed by their friendliness and willingness to learn about the Christian religion, that they agreed that Whitman should return to his home in New York, spend the winter in arousing interest in the projected work, and return in the following year, with the needed reinforcements, to carry on the missionary work successfully. In the month of June, 1840, he returned to Vancouver, arriving there on October 15, and was received by Dr. John McLaughlin with many expressions of kindness, and invited to stay at the winter school. Dr. Parker made his headquarters at Fort Vancouver, and was very busily engaged in exploring the country and making arrangements for the coming year. On June 18, 1840, when he left for Sandwich Islands, being conveyed thither without cost by the kindness of Dr. McLaughlin. After remaining long enough to gain a comprehensive idea of affairs in the islands, he again took ship and arrived at New London, Conn., on May 17, 1841, and returned to Green River, after an absence of over two years and two months. Dr. Whitman and wife and Rev. H. H. Spalding and wife came out to meet him at the winter school, and they arrived at Fort Vancouver on September 12.

While my father was greatly disappointed not to be able to start in 1840 with his old acquaintance, he was ready the following year and left Lafayette, Stark County, Ill. on March 21, with wife and four children, three River men and one boy, the son of one of the men; also John Dodge, wife and five children, three of them adults.

Waiting for the Ferry. Nothing occurred outside of the ordinary routine of the emigrant's daily experience until we reached Council Bluffs, where we waited for several days before crossing the Missouri, the ferryboat having been washed away. At length a steamboat hove in sight bound up stream and was hailed and the captain ordered the ferry to be taken across. This he refused to do, but said that he would return within two days, and that if there were 500 wagons ready to cross he would take the ferry across.

The two days passed, and on the morning of the third day a dim column of smoke was observed by the lookout on the opposite shore, and the ferryboat sprang into the flood to find her, if possible, and she was recovered through the aid of the faithful dog. Thus we awaited the approach of daylight, and then a scene beggarly description appeared. Not a blade of grass, not an animal in sight. Every grain was chilled to the marrow, and not a splinter of wood of any kind to be had to build a fire; and father had a severe attack of pleurisy, caused by exposure during the night. He decided that probably the animals had taken to the foothills, apparently three or four miles distant, and accordingly started in that direction, and luckily found them in a few hours. By 6 o'clock the teams were ready to move, and we traveled about four miles and camped near a large company of people, who, seeing our distressed condition, vied with each other in affording relief, and it was not long before we were enjoying the luxury of a warm meal as a result of the neighborliness of a number of Kentucky, Indiana and Missouri families, some of the children of whom are represented in this thirty-fifth annual reunion, among them Mrs. Laura B. Bartlett, Mrs. A. Knapp, Professor L. H. Baker, principal of the Woodstock school of this city, and Mr. John W. Barker, Cottage Grove, present State Game Warden. It is needless to say that the acquaintance formed under such circumstances ripened into lasting friendship on the part of those who were heads of families at that time. Upon examination it was found that several sacks of flour, and a considerable quantity of sugar and salt had been damaged by the flood of the night before.

From the place where these families were joined under the circumstances above described, and on westward to the Umatilla River, they traveled together for the most part in the main under the leadership of James Biles, although C. E. Barker, William B. Downey, William M. Kincaid and my father were often consulted with whenever especially difficult conditions were encountered, and these were of frequent occurrence.

In due time the Grand Ronde Valley was reached. This was early in August. Here we were met by E. N. Sarjent, who came from the Puget Sound region to meet his father's family, who were on their way to Oregon by way of Northern Oregon (Puget Sound), the conditions there being better for settlement than in the Willamette Valley, where the soil was so poor. Such an offer, under existing conditions, could not be passed by lightly; hence, after due consideration, it was accepted. The company pressed on over the Blue Mountains and reached the Umatilla River about August 15. Two days later, 132 persons, with 36 wagons, left the Grand Ronde Valley, and on the morning of the 17th we were at the mouth of the present city of Pendleton—the place was called "Swift's Crossing." If I am not mistaken—and drove direct to the mouth of the Umatilla River, on the Columbia River. We expected to find a Hudson's Bay Company flatboat at this place, but did not find one. The road was very rough, and we were obliged to make our own plank out of the driftwood to build a boat. I do not remember how long a time this required, but think it was as high as the top of a covered wagon. We made for the Yakima River, followed up that stream for some distance and crossed it eight times. The crossing of the river was very unsafe, and it was not until we were left to die alongside the rugged trail. Pathetic, indeed, were those experiences, in being compelled to leave the animals to the wilderness to starve. But there was no help for it, grievous as it might seem, and the animals were shot to end their misery. The only exception to this rule which I cannot pass. The C. B. Baker family had a blooded Kentucky mare, which became so exhausted as to be unable to get up one morning, and it was decided that she would have to be left behind. To this Mrs. Baker objected, and she thought a great deal of, and she told her husband to go on, and she would work with the mare awhile, and when she was able to get up she would take her with her. She gathered leaves, fed the beast, gave her water, talked to her encouragingly, finally got her on her feet, and she was able to get up with them at the noon camp. A little later this animal got down the second time, and was about to be abandoned. The determination of Mrs. Baker—"Aunt Fanny," as she was known by all—triumphed, and the mare was able to get up with the other horses of the best running horses known in the early days of Oregon and Washington.

Last Day's Journey. The last day's journey before reaching Connell's prairie cannot be forgotten. It came near having a tragic ending. Several days before, the teams were so jaded, it was decided that it would be a good policy to drive to the prairie and let them recruit on the luxuriant bunchgrass. This was done and the women and children and wagons were left in camp. In a week most of the teams returned, greatly strengthened. The next day all started on foot to the prairie, and notwithstanding the fact that but few if any of the party had any breakfast, all were jubilant over the prospect of "getting out of the wilderness" to a place where food could be obtained for man as well as beast. All the food our family had that day consisted of a scanty supply of salt-herrings, pickled prairie and let them recruit on the luxuriant bunchgrass. This was done and the women and children and wagons were left in camp. In a week most of the teams returned, greatly strengthened. 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