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THRILLING STORY OF THE APPLGATE TRAIN FIRST BIG IMMIGRATION TO OREGON COUNTRY

In the history of the emigration to Oregon of the residents of the East and the Middle West, the Applegate expedition of 1842, occupies one of several of the most colorful pages of the state's early records. It started from Independence, Missouri as early in the spring as it was possible to make the start, and the survivors settled in the lower basin of the Columbia.



There were between 875 and 1,000 men, women and children who composed the columns which marched across the plains and mountains on the long journey. The following account is taken from Bancroft's History of Oregon:

Early in the spring of 1842, or as soon as the grass began to grow, promptly, without preconcert, but as if by appointment, emigrants from every part of Missouri and the neighboring states were on the roads to the usual rendezvous in the vicinity of Independence. Their wagons were drawn by two or three or five yokes of oxen; on the covers were the words "For Oregon," and their immense herds of cattle filled the highways.

Meet From Many States.

Many of them had been neighbors at home, and often families of brothers, with their wives and little ones, constituted a colony. At all events they now had one common interest in the necessity for mutual aid and protection in the long journey before them. By the middle of May it was thought time to take action as a body, and on May 29 a meeting was held at Pinhook's hall, 12 miles west of Independence, to complete an organization.

R. Childs, was from the southeast portion of the state. Other parties, under T. D. Kaiser, Jesse Tauney, and Daniel Mathewey, swelled the army to nearly 1,000 persons, although the halting men were of years of age were less than 500.

Organization Is Effectuated.

This body of people adopted the usual rules followed by those on such an undertaking May 26, and on reaching the Kansas River organized by electing Peter H. Burnett captain, and J. W. Nesmith, orderly sergeant. Nine companies were chosen to assist in settling questions, and Captain John Gantt, a former army officer, engaged to conduct the company to Fort Hall.

Burnett resigned the command after eight days of service, William Martin being elected in his place.

The resignation of a captain on account of insubordination or inattention to rules probably effected a partial reorganization, for Martin seems to have remained in office. It was, however, found so difficult to direct or control so large a body of people united by no further interest than a common destination, that a division into two columns was effected on the Big Blue River; one wing consisting of that division which was unnumbered with herds, being called the "light column," and the other, being designated the "heavy column." These two divisions traveled within supporting distance only, in order not to interfere with each other's comfort or convenience, as far as Independence Rock.

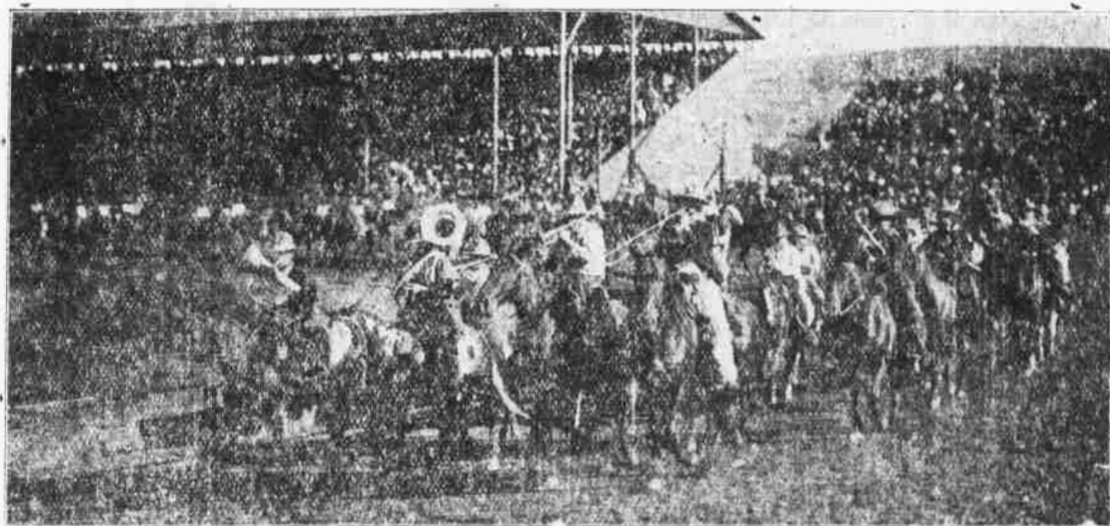
hot summer sunshine, few incidents befell the way, until the last of June the buffalo country was reached, where it was expected to obtain abundance of game; but a hunting expedition from New Orleans having preceded them, the buffaloes were driven from the line of travel. During the first five days of July the south branch of the Platte was crossed in ferry boats made of wagon-buses over which the green hides of buffaloes had been stretched and dried. At Fort Laramie, where the light column arrived July 14, a few days were taken to repair wagons, and purchase, at extortionate prices, some additional supplies.

Columns Broken Up.

No difficulty occurred with the natives; the numbers present, and recollections of chastisement a few years previous by Captain Bennett Riley with his artillery deterring them from predatory or hostile acts. After passing Independence Rock caution was considered necessary, and the two principal divisions were broken into smaller companies for greater convenience. Likewise this was a pleasant arrangement as leading men now found themselves at the head of the smaller divisions, and associated with those of congenial habits. Friendships were formed and cemented which lasted through life, surviving all the struggles and changes of the founding of a new empire.

Find Shorter Route.

A party was formed of these and others, with Dr. Whitman, who had joined the emigration on the Platte River, also anxious to reach his home, and to get news of his family and affairs at the fort, where he was likely to meet Cayuses and Nez Perces. At Green River they learned that the Jesuits, De Vos and Hoekken, had by means of their Flathead pilot, discover a pass through the mountains to Soda Springs, by way of Fort Bridger on the Black branch of Green River, a cut-off which saved considerable distance, information of which Whitman communicated to the companies by a letter left at Green River.



original number, save five, who turned back at the first crossing of the Platte. But on August 4 Clayborne Payne died of fever and was buried beside the road, the funeral services being conducted by a Methodist preacher named Garrison. At the Big Sandy, a tributary of Green River, Mr. Stevenson died August 8. Considering the number of persons on the march and the privations incident to camp life, the health of the emigrants was remarkably good, sickness and the death rate being scarcely that in a community of the same size in towns. There were births as well as deaths. Many an emigrant to Oregon first saw the light beneath a canvas tent on the roadside.

Supplies Come High.

Dragging themselves along in the

At this place died Daniel Richardson; and here also was found Lovejoy, who had come across from Bent Fort during the summer to join Whitman on his return to Oregon.

At Fort Hall there was the usual discussion upon changing from wagons to pack animals, it being finally decided to retain the wagons, as there were men enough to make a road where none existed. The chief objection was the lateness of the season. In their councils, both Grant of Fort Hall and Whitman were consulted. While admitting that the wagons might be taken to the Columbia River, Grant acknowledged that he did not know how it could be done, as he had travelled only by the pack-trail; but Whitman, from Newell's experience, believed that a wagon road was feasible, and encouraged the emigrants to decide in favor of the undertaking.

It had been the intention of the emigrants to take their wagons to the Columbia. They would open the way and show congress that the enterprise which the government was so slow to undertake was not beyond

(Continued on page 19.)



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