

IN A PRAIRIE SCHOONER, 1878

(Continued from Vol. XVIII., page 131.)

May 29.—Rained last night but it has cleared off and we are busy getting our things picked up ready to start; travel 13 miles and camped on the banks of the Elkhorn River for night; a cheese factory is in good working order here, with only one house in sight but the workmen told us they had the milk from 160 cows, but we wondered where they were.

May 30.—Our train started this morning, at 7 o'clock; go as far as Fremont,²² camp on the common at one end of the town, at 11 o'clock, for dinner. Here we did a little shopping, bought some woolen stocking yarn for 80c per lb. From here Cushman Hunter takes the cars for Cheyenne; he was bleeding at the lungs and it was thought best for him to go by rail. At 2 o'clock we start and go out 13 miles and camp near the Platte River; thunder and lightening and rain all night—not a moment's cessation, it seemed; if this is the style of Nebraska, I do not care to stop here long.

May 31.—The sky is clear this morning; start at 8 o'clock; passed through a little town called North Bend,²³ and we go to camp on the banks of the wonderful Platte River; it is a wide muddy looking river; as you look at it as it flows along, through such a dead level plain as Nebraska is, you almost seem to look up to see it; all along we follow this river.

June 1.—Start at 7 o'clock; sun shines very hot today; passed through a town called Schuyler,²⁴ it is a pretty little town; came on as far as Columbus²⁵—a large, dirty, foreign-looking place; we stop and buy what is needed; while we stand here a few minutes, we saw two men taken to the lock up; I should judge by just glancing around, that about 4/5 of the people ought to go there; they tell us here, that we cannot go any farther on account of Indians, but the story is not credited, so we shall proceed to pass through this interesting City, and camp on the banks of the Loup River. We had been informed, that the hog

²² In Dodge County, Nebraska; population, 9605.

²³ In Dodge County, Nebraska; population 1087. Here the travelers strike the route Oregon Trail.

²⁴ In Colfax County, Nebraska; population, 2636. Evidently the town and the county were named in honor of Vice-President Colfax.

²⁵ Columbus, Platte County, Nebraska; population, 5410.

cholera had prevailed in this community this season, but it was needless to inform us of this fact, as the loathsome stench greeted our nostrils from hundreds of carcasses which lined the banks of the river, extending even into the City; and we should judge by that stench, they have been there some time; clouding up again for another SouthWester—and at sundown it has opened its batteries upon us—hail, thunder, lightening, rain and wind; a regular gale; in the midst of the gale, three or four of the boys were holding on to the poles of Henry Hunter's tent, trying to keep it up, but as Mr. Hunter calmly remarked; "Keep cool, boys, there's a hen on," the tent suddenly collapsed, and they were buried in its folds. The ladies were in the wagon at the time. It rained a little all night.

June 2.—Pleasant this morning—cool and nice; it is a feature of this State, we are told; the storms are mostly in the night; laid over for today is the Sabbath; we have many callers, they are urging us very hard to settle here; it is a nice looking country, but oh, those thunder showers. I think we will pass on.

June 3.—Start out at 7:30 o'clock; it is a very pleasant day to travel.

June 4.—Today travelled 22 miles; passed Silver Creek,²⁸ and Jackson, small railroad towns;—saw a man from Wisconsin named Fox; camp 3 miles from Silver Creek.

June 5.—Laid over to wash; this is quite a large place;—clouding up again—we may look for another Nebraska thunder shower;—some of our company are talking about looking land up in the Loup River Valley. I hope they will not stop, for we have been so long together, it will be hard parting with anyone of our train.

June 7.—All are going on; and last night where you saw red and tearful faces, now all are fresh, smiling and happy, we do a little trading and move on; go 20 miles and make a camp; here we have plenty of room—the whole broad prairie spread out before us.

June 8.—Start at 7:30; pass through the same looking country and about the same distance, as yesterday, and took dinner in a little grove with a house and mill attached, dignified with the title of "Schpaupville Mills" (pronounce it to suit your taste). We proceeded to within 20 miles of Kearney, and camp for the night.

²⁸ In Merrick County, Nebraska; population, 583. Jackson is not shown on present-day maps.

June 9.—We started at 7.30 o'clock, this morning; rained all day a little; saw 6 elk today,—they were tame ones;—did not stop for dinner on account of rain;—now we are at Kearney;²⁷ arrived at 3 o'clock; we are going to stop over tomorrow here, for it is the Sabbath.

June 10.—A delightful day; attended church with Elder Morse, a brother of our old pastor, and strongly resembles him, we think; we heard a good sermon; it does us good for it has been four weeks since we heard the last one; 14 of us went today and some went this evening.

June 11.—7:30 we are ready to continue our journey; a beautiful morning; travelled 28 miles today, and camped at night, at Overton,²⁸ the place Flora Hollister used to live at—a very small town. Mr. Gifford accidentally shot a steer in the leg, while out hunting jack rabbits; he is likely to have some trouble about it, while we are having considerable fun over the accident, at his expense.

June 12.—Another nice morning and we are all ready to start; go as far as Plum Creek, and camp for noon; Mr. Gifford is arrested, and the sheriff happens to be a brother of Roll Smith of Durand; we had a first rate visit with him; told him all I could about his brother; he is a nice appearing gentleman; he showed us the jail and courthouse; there was a lady confined in the jail for the murder of her husband, and two men in for murder. The lady looked very sad—did not look as though she was guilty; she had her little girl with her. Mr. Gifford paid a fine of \$12½, to settle up his little hunting affair, and at 2 o'clock we started on; went 8 miles and camped; two wagons have joined our train here, from Kansas, bound for Washington territory.

June 13th—All ready to start at 7.30 o'clock—looks like rain; stop at noon for lunch;—Mr. Gifford has a sick horse on his hands but it grows worse and worse every minute; suddenly with a wild snort the horse arose, and with a wild gallop started down the road towards a house that is seen in the distance, and as it looks like rain, we conclude to hitch up and go as far as the house and corrol [corral] for the night as there is a terrible storm coming up. We just get in order, our wagons chained together and tent firmly staked down, when the terrible storm is over us, and such thunder and lightening, and wind I never saw before; we go to bed without our supper—only a bite of bread

²⁷ In Buffalo County, Nebraska; population, 7702.

²⁸ Overton, in Dawson County, Nebraska; population, 515.

and dried beef; and here, let me say, I shall always remember with grateful feelings, Jacob Bond and his present of a good generous piece of dried beef, and I shall never forget where we ate a portion of it and under what circumstances;—it stormed bitterly all night; the horses stamped and snorted, and but little sleep visited our eyes, I venture to say.

June 14.—Well, we are all alive this morning, but that is about all; the people all look rather blue, I guess Mr. Gifford feels as well as any of us, although he has a dead horse on his hands—it died last night. We are going to lay over here, and let the water dry up some before starting; we have heard that the railroad track is all washed away; no trains have passed today. Where we took dinner yesterday noon, a cloud burst and we were just in the edge of the storm. If we had camped there, as was our calculation, we should have been washed away, as where our wagons stood the water was ten feet deep. I have not a very good opinion of Nebraska so far.

June 15.—A beautiful day, so started upon our journey;—as we pass along we found 25 telegraph poles struck by lightning, one after the other;—farther on we saw four horses beside the road lying side by side, dead—struck by lightning;—camped by the railroad track, 5 miles from North Platte; could go farther but a bridge is washed away across a creek.

June 16.—A stray pony came into camp today; it proved to be Buffalo Bill's; Verney rode it and had a nice time;—Sunday, we lay over; a train of 10 wagons came up today and went into camp near us, close to a brick school-house. They are representatives of Missouri—a hard set, too.

June 17.—Start; fix the bridge so that the horses can get across; put chains on the end of the wagon tongue and draw the wagon over—and it took some time to do this; 22 wagons altogether, taken across, one by one;—came 5 miles to the village of North Platte;²⁹ here we saw the celebrated Buffalo Bill; he owns a ranch near here; passed through the town and travelled 12 miles; passed seven head of cattle, run over and killed by cars; went into camp near a section house.

June 18.—Today is pleasant and cool; travelled over clear prairie—nothing but herds of cattle and the Platte River for your eyes to rest upon—such a sameness. Here, in the Platte River country, the grass is very nutritious for cattle; there are 149 different varieties of grass along the Platte, and a great many

²⁹ North Platte, in Lincoln County, Nebraska; population, 10,466.

different kinds of Cactus, they look very beautiful their blossoms are as large as a dahlia and fully as handsome—of all colors, besides a great variety of other beautiful flowers.

June 19.—We have today seen vast herds of cattle, such as I have read about but never expected to see. As we pass through a town called Ogallala;³⁰ they tell us there has been 75000 head of cattle driven in from Texas, and I should not dispute it, for the broad prairie is one moving mass of cattle, driven by the Mexican herder on his pony, with his broad rimmed hat on, with two or three revolvers and a bowie-knife in his belt, he looks quite formidable. He carries in his hand a short handled whip, with a very long lash sometimes 20 feet in length and sometimes even longer than that. and woe be to the unlucky cow that strays out of line, for he is sure to hit her with that terrible whip. The Mexican and Texan herders are a very rough class of men—they think nothing of shooting each other on the slightest provocation: they had just had a little shooting scrape, in a saloon, as we passed through the town.

June 20.—Still nothing but cattle and ponies as far as you can see in any direction.

June 21.—Went a fishing today; caught enough fish for supper; they were excellent;—had splendid roads to travel over today:—they were like pavement.

June 22.—Start at the usual hour; very pleasant—good roads, and the same dead level prairie.

June 23.—Today is Sunday; a nice day to read and rest, and we enjoy it.

June 24.—Cushman Hunter came out from Cheyenne, to meet us, this morning, and brought us our mail: another feast from friends at home.

June 25.—Hitch our teams up at 7:30 o'clock and move on; The weather was very nice until about noon, then it thundered and rained some, though not hard; took our dinner at Point of Rocks, on these rocks Kit Carson carved his name: we see it very plainly, and many other names; we also with the memorable Kit Carson, leave our names beside his, on the rock monument.

June 26.—All well this morning and feeling fine; but this afternoon Mrs. Nettie Christian was taken sick, and we were obliged to stop early; and we saw for the first time those cloud-capped, snow-covered, ever-to-be remembered, Rocky Mountains.

³⁰ A town in Keith County, Nebraska; population, 1062.

June 27.—Nettie better this morning, we start at 8 o'clock; at noon as we stop for dinner, we see a covered wagon coming down the road; the cry goes around the camp; "Mr. Hunter is coming", and sure enough, we soon see his pleasant face, and right glad are we to see him and he to see his children; he takes the girls and Anna, and goes back and we follow on; at an early hour we arrive at Cheyenne³¹—a nice, bright, lively western town.

June 28.—Today we went down to James and Frank Hunter's places; saw some of the most elegant horses and carriages I ever saw; Mrs. J. Hunter looks much younger than I expected to see her; she seems in good spirits and is anxious to start on her journey—thinks it will benefit her health still more.

June 29.—We are still at Cheyenne, waiting for Mr. Hunter to get ready to journey on with us; at the same time looking the city over and viewing the points of interest in it.

June 30.—Sunday; rained so we could not attend church.

July 1.—Washed and baked; it is our intention to start on in the morning; there is some hard climbing before us.

July 2.—Started about 9 o'clock—as soon as they could get ready at Mr. Hunter's. Frank's folks and the Chaplain at Fort Russell³² (we passed the Fort and it looked very nice and clean, as all of Uncle Sam's dominions do) went out with us 5 miles, took dinner with their friends and started on our way over the Rockies;—went to the foot of Cheyenne Pass, and went into camp for night.

July 3.—Today we slowly wended our way up the mountain side; and as for giving a description of the beauty, grandeur, wildness, rugged, mountain peaks, deep canyons, beautiful flowers, etc.,—it is beyond my poor powers of [to] describe, in fact, it begs description; suffice it to say, I feel repaid for all the hardships, we have as yet undergone. We camped on the top for dinner; here we found strawberry blossoms growing within arm lengths of mighty banks of snow; these banks of snow have doubtless been there for ages, as canyons many hundred feet deep were filled even full, so hard that we could walk over them; had a lively game of snow-ball, experienced a very hard drive; in the afternoon drove as far as Laramie City,³³ about 50 miles from Cheyenne; Mrs. Hunter is very tired—indeed, as we all are,—but feel for her more, as she is not strong yet, although she is all courage.

³¹ Cheyenne, in Laramie County, Wyoming; population, 13,829.

³² Fort Russell, Laramie County, Wyoming.

³³ Located in Albany County, Wyoming; population, 6301.

July 4.—Well, this seems very little like the Nation's birthday, to us, although the cannon at Fort Laramie wakened us this morning telling us that such is really the case;—laying over here this afternoon to ascertain the best route to take; decided to go via Bridger's Pass:—get an early dinner and are ready to start at 1 o'clock; hear cannonading all the time, at Fort Sander, just across the river; drove 22 miles and camped near the little Laramie River, near a ranch; commenced raining before we got our tents up; had a hard shower as they often do at the base of the mountains; it is cleared off, however, so we could get our supper, and went to bed tired as usual.

July 5.—Started at 7:30 o'clock; drove down to the river and crossed all right, though the railroad ties are running like mad; the river is full of them, and looks and is dangerous to attempt to ford the stream, but we are all safely over; stop just the other side, get breakfast as we did not wait for it as we wanted to cross the river before the ties began running so thick that we could not; we did not stop for dinner as we had such a late breakfast, but we went into camp for the night at three o'clock this afternoon.

July 6.—Crossed a spur of the mountains today; the worst road we have had in the whole trip so far; it took 5 and 6 men to keep a wagon right side up and things got considerably mixed before they got down the mountain side, you can judge; we all walked of course as we always do when we have bad roads; passed an abandoned mine—did not pay to work it; came across Rock Creek, here, found a toll bridge; had to pay 31c a team to cross, these streams are all made from melting snows in the mountains and are very swift, rapidly flowing ones; have seen snow every day since June 26.

July 7.—Today is Sunday; we are laying over; camped at the base of Elk mountain; it is covered with snow: it looks to be less than a mile from camp to the snow but it is over 6 miles.

July 8.—Over the mountains this morning we started; came to another toll bridge; they asked 50c a team to cross it, and we concluded not to give it; it was not a wide stream, but the water ran like a torrent at that particular place. We informed them that we preferred fording it rather than giving them their price. In a short time the stream was running full of ties; they had gone above us a short distance and were shoving them off as thick as they could. This looked rather bad for fording the stream; but we worked it in this wise; several members of our party

went above the bridge a little ways, and with heavy poles held the ties back while a team crossed, then let them go; then held the ties again, until another team had crossed; and so on until the entire train had forded the stream safely. Then three hearty cheers were given and we went on our way.

July 9.—With another beautiful morning before us, we start over the Plains and far away; came to the Platte River and stopped to wash; don't know how we are going to cross.

July 10.—Here we are yet; are to start at noon; started at noon, some of the teams forded, and some crossed on the ferry; it took until night to get them all over, and a storm came up just as the last team landed; we went into camp immediately after crossing. One of the teams that forded lost a tire off the wagon, and it could not be found.

July 11.—Going to stop, burn coal and set the tire this afternoon, so will not start until noon;—it is a beautiful morning after the shower;—started after dinner, went about 14 miles; stopped for night.

(To Be Continued)