

# Diary of a Hoosier Goldhunter

By Alfred H. Nunemacher

## ***Introducing a Thrilling Chronicle.***

IN THE West there was Gold...

When 150 adventurous men of Louisville, New Albany and the surrounding country set out for California, they were only a small part in a great tide of Westward migration which had begun with the discovery of gold in 1849.

Among the goldseekers from the Ohio Falls were some who found gold and a great many who did not. But one of them, Alfred [A.] Nunemacher of New Albany, left something which is more valuable to posterity than any gold which he might have mined – a day-by-day chronicle of the arduous, dangerous and weary crawl of the company to the Pacific Coast.

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WHEN Nunemacher, full of youthful energy and romantic ambition, and backed financially by his father, Conrad Nunemacher, a tailor, set out on the trip, he was afire with tales of the fabulous wealth which was to be found in California.

Nunemacher's account of his adventures, quaintly titled "Diary of a Trip to California Overland," has been preserved by his niece, Miss Elizabeth Nunemacher, a resident of New Albany. In spite of its age, it retains a flavor of freshness, vividly yet honestly relating the tragic, humorous and picturesque events of the journey. Editing has consisted chiefly of abridgment.

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TODAY, when the distance from Louisville to California may be spanned by air in a few hours, it is amazing to think that 150 men should have started out together on a trip which took months to complete. But gold can blind eyes to all obstacles – and physical hardship still was commonplace to the people of that day.

Recent publication of the book, "Sutter's Gold," and appearance in Louisville of the motion picture of that name indicate the public interest in the famous Gold Rush. Because of that interest and because of its fundamental worth, Nunemacher's diary is published in The Weekly Feature Section serially – an exclusive feature.

Do not expect the adventure to end in a dazzling Eldorado. There was no pot of gold at the end of the New Albany youth's rainbow. But you will find the story worth while. And, incidentally, you may read for the first time of the part played by your father, grandfather or great-grandfather in the Gold Rush. – EDITOR'S NOTE.

*How the band of Forty-niners embarked at New Albany on a steamboat for the cruise down the Ohio and up the Missouri. And how, after he had sold his Shakespeare (keeping the Bible), the writer set out in the oxen train to traverse the prairie --- at a speed of 15 miles per day.*

ON THE 27<sup>th</sup> day of March, 1850, I, in company with 150 [others] citizens of New Albany, Indiana, left that city in the steamer Courtland, Capt. Jack Briscoe, bound for St. Joseph, Missouri, en route for the New Eldorado. Our mess was comprised of five; viz.: Daniel Cline, John Nafius, Joseph Gilmer, Joseph Simcoe and myself.

We had previously sent Cline and another of ours down to a point on the Ohio called Mormon's Landing, to purchase and ship our cattle, as it was our intention to use oxen in our jaunt. When the boat arrived at the landing we found the oxen ready for shipment, which was effected with but little trouble, although we had oxtail soup that day on the boat.

Arriving at St. Louis on Saturday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, we laid by for the Sabbath. Slowly wound our way up among the shoals and sandbars of the Missouri River to Liberty Landing. Liberty is a small town about four miles from the north bank of the Missouri River in Clay County. We lay by here several days in order to allow our cattle to regain their strength and suppleness, lost by a close confinement of several weeks on the decks of a steamboat. Here seeing the necessity of having as light loads as possible, I sold my Shakespeare and all my books except my mother's Bible.

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HAVING recruited man and beast, we yoked up and made a start for the crossing of the Missouri at St. Joseph, after which we would be on Indian ground. The part of Missouri through which we passed is wonderfully rich. I repeatedly thrust a walking cane up to the hand in the black soil without hindrance. The inhabitants thinking we go to California to spend money rather than getting it, obeyed the Scripture command, and took us in at every occasion, being strangers, yet they did no more than our fellow [citizens], Capt. Briscoe of the steamer in which we came, did.

We arrived at St. Joseph on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April. This is a brisk lively town of perhaps 8 or 9 thousand inhabitants. The chief business of the town is the supply of the trains going to California which is very profitable trade.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of April we crossed the Missouri, the boundary line between our confederation and the wild prairies, the home of the Indian. This seemed the first real step toward our distant goal. We have crossed the Rubicon and cannot turn back. ONWARD.

We encamped for two days about 2 miles from the water's edge, for rest and preparation.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, our teams rolled out onto the broad prairie, preceded by a lively march from Will Reisinger on his bugle.

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April 27.

E. E. DUNCAN'S team stalled today, and we remained behind to help him out of his scrape. It seems almost unbelievable but men and their wagon sink so deeply that often it requires the length of three days to pull them out. Camped for the night on the bleak prairie. While Gilmer broiled a cut of ham and made coffee on our emigrant stove, I cut prairie grass, and Simcoe got water from a stream about a mile behind. We found our sheet iron stove invaluable, as it required but a tithe of the fuel otherwise used.

April 29.

Made but seven miles being compelled to stop by a severe wind. By invitation of Cousin Will Reisinger, I went over to their tent to a turkey dinner, served up by that prime caterer Jim Abbey. Wild turkey cooked by Jim Abbey!

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May 3.

NOW commences our troubles. One of our oxen has taken the hollow horn and we know of nothing to do but to bore a hole in the horn and insert salt and vinegar. But the prospect for the future use of the creature is small.

We are now traveling under an organization of 7 wagons consisting of McBride's, Armstrong's, Reisinger's (bugler for our band), Stewart's of Louisville, Duncan's (whom we pulled out), Morrison's and Gilmer's. We are agreed to help each other in case of any trouble, and to travel together, the more surely to guard against the attacks and troubles of Indians. We have a committee whose duty it is to select a camp-ground every evening, and to see the proper formation of a corral. This is the placing of all the wagons in a circle, the cattle inside. Guards are set every night. Our own mess is arranged thus: Gilmer is chief cook, Simcoe is his assistant, Dan Cline, John Nafius and myself have cattle to feed, water and gather in after rest at noon, or at all times, and also do the driving.

We crossed Big Blue River today, it being about the width of Silver Creek above Albany, and a very pretty stream. We are now about 150 miles from Platte River. The country is a rolling prairie with nothing to guide the eye, except in the vicinity of rivers, which are generally edged with a fair show of cottonwood and other light woods. Traveled 14 miles today. Passed the grave of John Abbott an old citizen of our town who left the comforts of a sure independence at home to fill the sails of avarice in the golden land. He never saw the Pacific shore.

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[Sunday], May 4.

HEARD that John Bradley and John Green were lost from Lindley's mess. Bad news. Jake Davis overtook us with a yoke of his cattle which had been lost and found again. Beers has by his excessive driving, from fear of Portland overtaking him, compelled all but two messes to drop behind.

I stood guard last night for the first time. It was very cold. Water froze in our buckets. This backward weather will be hard on our cattle, as the grass is not yet tall enough to do them any benefit. If our corn gives out before the grass comes we will have a hard row to hoe. We met merchandise wagons from Fort Kearney, which tell us that there is no grass ahead. We have but five days' feed left. Distance 15 miles.

Sunday, May 5.

Our company is now but three wagons. Reisinger's, McBride's, and ours. Sic transit, etc. Traveled 16 miles.

May 6.

Two miles from last night's camp. We found a fine creek and camped for the day, for a general wash and clearing up. Washing was a hard job for me, but perseverance and hard soap achieved the object after a manner.

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May 7.

CAME eleven miles to Little Blue Creek. Saw six or seven buffalo today. Bill Reisinger gave us a serenade tonight. It almost brought tears to my eyes, when the memories of home were so forcibly recalled by his "Home, Sweet Home." After he had closed his performance, a pack of wolves emulated his music to our disgust. A few rifle balls quieted them.

May 11.

Platte River and pretty good grass. Wrote letters home to father and Elisha Sinex.

May 12.

Sabbath. Clear and pleasant as one could wish. Lay up today to rest and refresh ourselves and cattle. Beers, one of the group racing us, is about four days ahead, driving hard for the gold regions. Almost all our boys are writing letters home. We expect to send our letters to the frontier by return traders, who never refuse to do this service for outward bound emigrants. Some of our boys cast their hooks and lines in the sandy waters of the Platte today, but met with no success.

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May 13.

REACHED Fort Kearney today at 12½ o'clock and camped one mile beyond. The fort is built of sun-dried bricks and contains inside three good frame houses. It rests in the valley of the Platte on a level plain. A good taste in the cultivators. The entire place is dreary and desolate looking. 16 miles.

May 14.

The river here is fully one mile wide, but very shallow. The river is not navigable for anything more than canoes and shallops of the Indians. Camped on the bank of the river and drove our cattle to an island for grass. The grass is very scarce, but there is plenty. Of all the messes which left the Missouri River, only Reisinger's and ours remain together. 14 miles today.

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May 15.

MET a fur train of St. Joseph, who give us news of grass ahead. After passing them we found it and camped for noon. The Platte bottom lands have an incrustation, very similar to saleratus, settle over them at intervals like hail. It lies for a long time. John Williams, one of our men, baked bread with some of it, but I did not taste it. I sent home some of it to be analyzed. Camped west of Plumb Creek, a stream said to possess the cardinal virtue of poisoning cattle. We did not attempt the experiment. We are badly bothered with mosquitoes. We cooked our victuals today with the remains of an old Indian wigwam. It did not detract from the sweet taste of our rashers of coffee. 18 miles.

May 16.

Met 12 wagons belonging to traders from Salt Lake and the civilized world. Made nine miles in our journey, stopped for noon, and held a meeting of the company, and authorized the secretary to draft rules for the governing of the company, said rules to be submitted to us for sanction at a similar meeting to be held at noon on the succeeding day.

Traveled 8 miles in the afternoon, stopped for the night where there was neither wood nor water. Brought water from the Platte River, one mile from camp, and cooked with buffalo chips. The day has been windy and dusty. Splendid dinner today composed of venison killed by Dan Cline, and macaroni, a present from James Abbey.

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May 17.

WE ROUSED at 4 this morning, journeyed 4 miles and breakfasted, then went on till dinner and from 1 to 5 p.m. We find this an excellent way to divide our time, as we get the use of the still pleasant morning. Were highly delighted today with the spectacular show of a burning prairie, gotten up regardless of expense. Every adjective that the English language contains would not more than describe the grandeur of the sight. But the malignity of man caused it, as it is supposed to have been started by forward teams to embarrass rearward emigrants.

Today we were regularly formed into company, rules being signed, guards appointed, and officers selected. Stevens of Louisville is captain. Total 18 miles.

May 21.

Saw today immense herds of thousands of buffalo, but did not succeed in preempting any of their carcasses. But another of the group (Bill Huncilman) was luckier and gave us enough to make us sick. 'Tis delicious meat, but unhealthy for a sudden change. Camped on South Fork of Platte. Distance 20 miles.

May 22.

TODAY was as exciting a day as we have had. Although we are far from civilization, yet we had one of the surroundings of a civilized people today. We had races, known among us as "South Fork Races." It happened thus:

About 9 a.m. a solitary horseman (vide G. P. R. James) might, could, would, or should have been seen, swiftly riding toward the Land of Gold, and as he passed Will Reisinger's team, the foolish creatures got ambitious. At all events they started in as hot haste as cattle can go, and alarmed McBride's team. His started ours, and then such racing and chasing (on Canobie Lee) I never wish to see again while all our earthly goods are at stake. It was a long chase and a distressingly tiresome one before we succeeded in checking the steeds. Had a fine ramble this afternoon with Capt. Stevens (whose duty it is to provide proper halting places) in search of grass, and found some pretty flowers, but they did not have the fragrance I thought, as exhaled by the flowers at home. Camped at Platte River without wood. Distance gained 19 miles.

May 24.

FORDED Platte River, which is here half a mile wide, and sandy bottom. All crossed in safety by 8 a.m. We rolled along until half past five. Walking on in advance of the train, thinking how rough it would be to camp without wood, water or grass, and we understood that it was 23 miles from ford to fork, too far for a day's journey commenced at half past eight, and none of either until we arrived at North Fork, I suddenly came in view of the grandest natural scene I ever beheld. Ash Hollow with its towering crags and winding hollows lay in the distance with the river at its head. A gladsome sight to us. Distance 21 miles.

May 25.

Today completes one month of our pilgrimage since leaving St. Joseph. Traveled up the North Fork of Platte River. Road heavy from sand. Grass tolerably good. Came to a camp of five tents of Sioux Indians, but all they wanted or knew was "Whisk" (whisky).

At dinner we had the presence of four squaws, filthy, dirty and woe-begone.

This evening we came up to a village of 20 tents of Sioux Indians. Here we were detained by their foolishness, until a terrific storm of wind came on and caused such a whirling and throwing of sand, as to penetrate our clothing, wagons and everything, blinding our eyes, and almost crazing our oxen. Such things must be seen and felt to be realized. We camped about one mile from the other savages. Heard today that Duncan was two days ahead, having bought some cattle of a trader here. This was a hard day on us and our cattle. Distance 15 miles.

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Sunday, May 26.

ANXIOUS to get clear of our Indian neighbors, we took breakfast one mile beyond another village of 21 tents.

These wigwams are made of buffalo hides, sewed together and stretched over a framework, and in these they are born, eat, sleep, die, and I almost said were buried. They are all without exception dirty to filthiness, beg of you until in desperation you give one something to get rid of him, when he goes off, and in great gratitude to you, brings all his relations, and all his wife's relations, and their relations to beg something too. They gather around us while we are eating, pick up a biscuit, ask for it which is entirely unnecessary after their dirty paws once touch it, as no American could afterwards eat it. We started on, went 4 miles, rested the balance of the Sabbath. Distance 8 miles.

This is the second installment of an absorbing diary by Alfred H. Nunemacher, a New Albany youth who in 1850, with 150 other gold-thirsty adventurers from the Falls Cities, set out to make his fortune in California. The first installment told of the trip down the Ohio and up the Missouri River on a steamboat and the first part of the journey overland, past Fort Kearney and along the Platte River. – Editor's Note.

*How the party reached the rock which was named after Louisville's Courthouse and how they struggled ahead through the sand and over rocks, with half-starved oxen.*

May 27.

DURING the night, it rained hard. The Portland mess lost an ox during the night. Disagreeable day for travel, rainy and windy. Several ox teams passed us this morning while at breakfast. Hoisted an American flag on our wagon today. Camped in sight of the Court House Rock. Distance 21 miles.

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May 28.

THIS morning after breakfast, Dan and I started out to view the Rock, which is a large isolated rock, lying off apparently some two miles from the route, making a calculation that by good walking we could get back to find, as we walked, that for a long time it appeared to get no nearer, and it really was at least seven miles out. We at last gained the rock and were amply repaid for our walk in the immensity of the strange structure, and the magnificent view we obtained from the top of it. Imagine a huge mass of sandstone as large as the court house in Louisville, a resemblance to which gave it the name through Edward Bryant of Louisville some years since. I cut my name on top for other ninnies to read. We got back to camp by nightfall, wearied and worn. Found camp at foot of Chimney Rock.

June 1.

Forded Laramie River in safety which here is about 30 yards wide. Fort Laramie is situated on its bank (western) about one mile from the mouth. It is very neat, contains some very fair houses and appears to be the nucleus of considerable trade with the Indians. There are an immense number of emigrant wagons around the fort, it being as it were an oasis in the desert, at which the wearied traveler stops to rest and renew himself for the journey.

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June 4.

BROKE camp at 6 a.m. Traveling very bad, as our route is over muddy hills, much cut by thousands of passing teams. They are numberless, causing one to think that California would soon be well populated. We struck this morning what is called the Mormon trail, being the route passed over by that people in reaching their present location. Soon after we crossed a creek, and after dinner passed another, the water of which was very clear and pleasant to taste. Distance 17 miles.

June 6.

Forded Deer Creek this morning and overtook Jim Shields, and the rear guard of the Albany boys. It pleased me much to meet my old friends again, and I hope we may remain together. We had a long chat on bygone days, and hoped for the good time coming.

James Shields is an exception among men. Warm hearted to an extremity, yet contrary to the experience of most warm-hearted persons, steady, moral and affectionate. May he be successful in all he undertakes, as I know he will go into nothing his conscience will not approve. Camped in a beautiful valley about 10 miles from the ferry. To the left of us, running parallel with the river, is a range of high hills with snow-capped peaks. They look refreshing of a warm June day. Distance 11 miles.

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June 7.

STARTED at 6 a.m. and reached Platte ferry at 10 a.m. There are four boats in operation, and rather than to delay to put a line across and make arrangements to ferry in our wagon beds, we paid \$4 per wagon and were all across in good style by 2 p.m. While at the river, Lindley of Orange County, Indiana, came up with nine wagons. The rest of the Albany wagons had just crossed over. This ferry is a splendid source of revenue to the owners, a Missouri company. While the emigration is passing they can make from two to three hundred dollars a day. After crossing the river we have 20 miles before us without water. We traveled till 9 at night, making 16 miles during the day.

June 10.

Forded Sweetwater near Independence Rock. This rock is an oval, said to be half a mile long and 350 feet high, stands on the bank of the river. It is round on top, and received its name from a party of Americans celebrating the Fourth of July at its base, or on its top, I don't know which. It is certainly another wonder in this land of strange things. Sweetwater River is about 30 yards wide, with low banks and so very crooked that we are told that we cross it seven times. We drove on to a huge chasm in the mountains through which the river flows, called the Devil's Gate, and we deemed it the most appropriate name we could give it. We camped here for the remainder of the day, and Captain Armstrong's and our mess took on our wagon beds, cut them shorter and coupled them closer, as by that means we lessen the difficulty of hauling. Distance 8 miles.

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June 11.

OUR cattle move slowly today, as if their rest yesterday did them harm. We passed three small creeks in three hours, and to our right, as we travel, is an extensive range of rocky hills. The face of the country appears to be an immense patch of wild sage and bitter grass. Camped one mile ahead of Lindley. Distance 18 miles.

June 12.

After 7 miles of travel, we came to a creek where we had the choice of eight miles of shady road around, or ferrying across in our wagons. We chose to ferry, which we succeeded in doing in four hours in safety, and one mile farther came to a place where the river ran between two high mountains and around the base of them, so that we had to ferry across twice to get on the side we started from, or carry our goods up a heavy ledge of rock where but one man could pass at a time, or go back and take the heavy road. Rather than go back we packed our goods across, and rafted our wagons, one on the other. We succeeded in crossing, and had our supper over, ready to start again at 7 p.m. We traveled till 10 p.m., making eight miles in three hours. We are now in the midst of the Snake Indians, a thievish and hostile tribe. We can see their fires on the mountain sides. Distance 15 miles.

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June 13.

THIS has been another hard day. Soon after starting we forded Sweetwater again, and during the whole day, had a heavy sand and gravel road, and a stormy head wind all the way. My heart sickens to see our poor cattle, half starved, struggling to pull our wagons through the heavy sand, over the rock roads, looking as though every moment would see them fall exhausted. We must lighten our load or we will never see California. Our captain has been too sick to do duty today. After crossing the river we saw no water until we reached Sweetwater again, 16 miles apart from the last ford, and forded it again twice in two hours, and camped with poor grass. It seems as if the grass this season will be poor. We expect to cross the Rocky Mountains Sunday.

June 14.

Came across Hick James' wagon left behind. Suppose they found a lighter one and threw theirs away. I prophesy that our company will not hold together more than a week longer. They drive too hard. Today we strike the foot of the Rocky Mountains. The road for three hours' travel is very steep, rocked and crooked. In the afternoon it snowed hard with a severe southwest wind directly in our faces. A very dismal day. Considerable sickness among us. Dan Cline and four others down with the fever. John Nafius is unwell and the whole duty of the cattle devolves upon me, and that in the worst time it could happen. I do not think that I have mentioned that John Nafius, myself and Dan Cline have the entire duty of moving the machine. It is our duty to see that our cattle get grass and water, to take them out to pasture, and hunt them up again when needed. This is often a very tedious matter, taking hours of morning work. It is our place in turns to do the driving, and Gilmer does the cooking and does it well, while Simcoe provides fuel and water, no trifling duty. He often hangs a sack on rear of the wagon, and when he sees a nice buffalo chip, in it goes, and by camp time he has plenty of fuel. Distance 18 miles.

June 15.

ANOTHER disagreeable day. The wind blows the sand in our eyes until they sting as if full of nettles. And the cattle labor under these hard winds in a most painful manner. We camped on the summit of the Pass of the Rocky Mountains, at the Pacific Springs, the headwaters of the first stream we came to that flows toward the setting sun. The latter part of the road over the Pass was very good. Grass around here is bitter. Cattle do not like it. Distance 23 miles.

Sunday, June 16.

Today I took out the nice kit of tools that father bought me, hoping that they might be useful in California, and piled them up by the roadside for anyone who had use



for them. This I did to lighten up my load. Dan Cline is up again, but looks weakly. Will Reisinger's mess left us today on account of severe driving. Jo Simcoe left our mess today, as Dave Lindley agreed to take him through for one week's work in the mines. This lightened us up some, as he took his share of the provisions. O'Neill is in sight ahead with a small horse wagon. Stopped at Pacific Creek for the day, as from where we see no more water for 23 miles. We are only one mile and a half from Pacific Springs.

June 17.

Left Pacific Creek today on our own hook, determined hereafter to do our own driving as it suits us. Passed Big Sandy, a brackish creek, and camped on Little Sandy with passable grass. Some foot travelers passed us today, having left St. Joseph two weeks after us.

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June 19.

REACHED BIG SANDY about 8 a.m. Crossed all safe, and expect to reach Green River by noon, but I think it doubtful. The road is still very good with the exception of short reaches of sand and cobble stones. Did not reach Green River until 1:30 p.m. and ferried over at the lower ferry, having to do all the labor ourselves. Green River is here about 100 yards wide, pretty deep, and exceedingly swift, being more like a river than any stream this side the Missouri. Had great difficulty in crossing our cattle; they were stubborn. Sold one yoke of worn-out cattle for \$21, and considered that clear gain, as a few days more would have compelled us to leave them. Cottonwood and willow trees in abundance line the banks of the river.

June 21.

Forded Harris Fork of Green River at same time as Lindley. Harris Fork is about 30 yards wide, but pretty deep. At the ford is a trading post where our eyes beheld a domestic scene. Two cats playing around was the enticing object. Trivial as it may seem, the sight of them abide me go back in my mind to the departure from civilization, and thence on the future to the return.

June 22.

Passed Fort Bridge at 5 p.m. This is a trading post of the American Fur Co. It is a collection of mud houses, situated in a well-watered bottom land, there being seven creeks within one mile of it. We camped tonight within 300 yards of snow, and had first-rate grass.

Sunday, June 23.

It seems to me we do not well carry out our intention to rest on the Sabbath. The great majority of our Sundays have been abused by traveling or working. This is a beautiful clear morning, such a one as would bring forth the beauty of New Albany, and here am I, driving an ox team "Westward ho!"

We laid by at 9 a.m., with good grass and water. Stevens and Burgans of Louisville are camped close beside, the Albany boys all being ahead.

This is the third installment of the diary of Alfred H. Nunemacher, young New Albany adventurer who in a party of 150 set out from the Falls Cities in 1850 to hunt for gold in California. The first two installments told how after two and a half months of plodding travel in an oxen-drawn wagon, Nunemacher's group finally crossed the Rocky Mountains. – EDITOR'S NOTE.

*The caravan reaches Salt Lake City, where a thirsty Mormon buys a pint of \$4-a-gallon whisky for \$5 and where two "disgustingly vile" Indiana men are spotted.*

June 24.

We passed over the ridge today which divides the waters of the Great American Basin from the Colorado. We were two and one-half hours crossing. The country around is all hilly. Found snow on each side of the road today. There is considerable sickness again. John Moore was taken down today and (ci devant) Capt. Stevens has just got out from a long confinement. 'Tis an easy matter to talk about, but imagine yourself dangerously sick amid the bleak hills, compelled day after day to drag your weak limbs after the toiling train or lay in the rough wagons, being jostled along as if every while you would be torn to pieces; not propped up on soft pillows, with every indulgence which goes to make sickness endurable; no kind friends coming in and sympathizing with you; no good Dr. Wilcox to give you sweet oleaginous, not anything except the kind eye of God who cares for us all, however much we may forget Him.

The amount of emigration is not as heavy on this route, as the Sublette cut-off entices the multitude.

June 25.

TODAY we ferried Bear River, doing the work in Hooper's wagon, which we found well suited for the use. We also ferried three other teams for \$3 each. Burgans turned his wagon bed over in attempting to ferry, and two men narrowly escaped drowning. We passed several Indian camps today, and I tried to trade for a pony, but they were too high in their demands for a poor man. Today I had the pleasure of coming across Bill Abel, a young man who was raised by Cousin Joe Quigley of Washington, Ind., but who since moved to Michigan. Our reminiscences of boyhood days in old Daviess County were very entertaining to me.

June 26.

Our route today lay down a lengthy valley, bounded on one side with perpendicular ledges of red rock in places 500 feet high, on the other by green hills of great height. There was a creek winding down the valley which, by its tortuous course, compelled us to cross it nine times, all bad crossings. As we advance toward Salt Lake the roads become more hilly, and the more hills we go up, the more we go down. While sitting on a rock by the wayside today, I picked up a scrap of paper, and found it to be a billhead of J. R. Nunemacher, my elder brother in New Albany. Strange that so far from home this waif met my eyes. We camp this evening near Weber River, and several of the boys go ahead to catch fish to feed us, but their labor was all in vain. Distance 24 miles.

June 27.

Another very unpleasant day. We ferried Weber River today in the same manner we did Bear. The river is high and swift, and the banks are really crowded for some distance up and down with the teams crossing and across. Mostly horse teams but some oxen. The process of crossing is thus: We pass a rope across the stream, the rope passing through rings in the bow of Hooper's wagon. We then unload our goods, take our wagons all apart, and load the boat, pulling it across by hand, loading and unloading till all is over. Distance 10 miles.

June 29.

WE FOUND the roads very bad today until we arrived within 5 miles of Salt Lake. The view of the city, with the lake in the distance, was very handsome from the hillsides, but the place is not such as I expected to find. The houses are all built of adobe, or sun-burned brick, which makes the house look as if it were built of squares of mud.

The city is greatly scattered over an immense stretch of valley. It presents a clean, cheerful aspect, and industry is the order of the place. The population (1850) is 6,000 souls, but there are several other smaller towns adjacent, and the country is well populated.

The city is watered by ditches cut in the sides of the streets in which flows down the water from the mountain side, clear and bright. You need not fear to stoop and drink of it, as no cows, hogs, etc., are to be seen in the city.

This city is an instance of what energy and fanaticism will do in three short years, and it is destined to be a great inland place. But we saw enough of the demoralizing effect of the Mormon religion to disgust us. We found a couple of our own citizens here, identified with the church, who were well-known at home in New Albany to be most disgustingly vile.

I here sold a pint of brandy which was what was left of one gallon which our mess of five bought in New Albany for \$4 per gallon to a poor thirsty Mormon for \$5. If he can get that much good out of it, he can do more than I can.

We traded off our wagon for a lighter one, and received James Shields into our mess.

The Saints are very bitter in their denunciation of outside heathen (Uncle Sam) and deem themselves justified in anything they do against us, and claim they are as well justified in keeping two or more wives as we are in keeping two or more horses, cows, etc., thus classing women and cattle. God cannot look with an approving eye on such a people.

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July 2.

WE ARE eight miles from the city, and the immensity of Great Salt Lake is in view. This lake is so intensely salt that no living thing is contained in it, and connects with Utah Lake 25 miles south, which lake is fresh and well supplied with fish.

July 4.

Spent in the valley of the Great Salt Lake the early part of the day mending our wagon tongue, the latter in traveling under a hot sun over a heavy road. Ferried Weber River again this afternoon and camped near it. We are among a tribe of Indians that subsist on baked crickets and roots. Distance 20 miles.

July 5.

Today I have been very unwell and weak, in consequence of careless exposure at Weber River; must be more careful hereafter.

Passed a couple of springs today close together, one hot and the other cold, and both salt. There is no accounting for tastes in this heathen country.

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July 9.

A BARREN country, no grass, no wood, but little water and that not good. We passed a large creek today, which sinks into the ground in a sandy plain as does Lost River in Indiana. All the water of the region appears to be caused to disappear through subterranean outlets.

July 11.

Passed the junction of the roads today, and again fell in with that immense volume of emigration which went by the Sublette cut-off this year.

Duncan is extremely anxious to get to California earlier than James Shields who left his mess for ours.

July 12.

A rough, hilly road today hard on wagons. Struck Goose Creek valley in the afternoon, and found it a Golgotha of the cattle which had died from effects of alkali water. Camped in the midst of the charnel house.

Sunday, July 14.

Reached Thousand Spring Valley and found it all a mistake. Found two splendid springs, and that was all we could find; suppose the balance have sunk away. There are two creeks, one a hot stream, and the other running into sloughs. The Indians around here are dangerous and troublesome, stealing and killing cattle, but with good care we have escaped their ravages so far.

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Sunday, July 21.

HAVE been quite ill, so that I could not journalize. We have traveled well this week, coming close up to Hopper, though he has been making five miles more per day than we. Our average has been 24 miles per day this past week. The number of teams on this road in our vicinity is tremendous.

July 22.

A GOOD DAY'S DRIVE. Mary's River is the poorest river we have yet come to. Our road generally runs 2 or 3 miles from the river and sloughs between, so that it is a matter of immense work to get to the grass. Since leaving the city I have been ailing, and am heartily sick of being sick.

July 24.

This morning one of the teams took the Lawson route, and went some distance before discovery of the error. This is the route Keller of New Albany took last year, and did not arrive in California until November; but we were better posted and kept the main road. Camped again on this miserable river. If Mary (whoever she was) was no more attractive than the river bearing her name, she will doubtless need going to California to preserve her from living an old maid.

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July 25.

WE THINK we are nearing the Sink of the river (the way the rivers of this region have of leaving the country), and it behooves us to prepare for crossing the desert, which lies beyond; the river is still very full, but appears to spread itself more than usual over the ground. Today after going eight miles around a slough, we lay by five hours cutting grass to pack across the desert. At this cutting we stripped ourselves, tied our clothes in a bundle, waded through the slough, mud, and water at least half a mile, and then dressing again, we tediously carried the grass over; then back and forth for the five hours. We traveled til 12 at night to make up for delay.

This is the fourth and concluding installment of a diary by Alfred [E.] Nunemacher, New Albany tailor's son, who in a party of 150 started from the Falls Cities in 1850 to join the gold rush to California. With the conclusion of the last installment, Nunemacher and his comrades had passed Salt Lake City and were preparing to cross a desert. – Editor's Note.

*The long trek ends at last --- and almost tragically. The adventurer tells of a rattlesnake, rheumatism, \$1.25-a-pound flour and an ill-fated sea voyage.*

July 26.

THERE seem to be very different ideas as to the distance to the desert. Some say 10 miles, others 25, others 70. I think we will reach it tomorrow. Food is getting scarce, and everyone is eating grass.

July 27.

Four months ago today we left New Albany amid tears and cheers, for California, and yet we are not there. This morning we had a stretch of 13 miles without water, and camped ahead of Hooper, in spite of his fast going. Teams are abundant and more coming. We are comparatively early in the migration. Had a good road today. Our information is that we are now 20 miles from the edge of the desert.

July 29.

Unpleasant traveling today on account of high winds and terrible dust, filling eyes, nose, mouth and clothes. Took supper in the valley of the Cold Slough, and after went to a place called the Meadows, where we expect to cut grass for the desert. We have been 20 miles from the desert for 4 days, and suppose we are now about 20 miles yet. The river is spreading over an immense surface of ground, and will finally disappear altogether.

July 30.

We appear to be at a grand depot for packing, tightening up, and general preparation for serious business. The destruction of property is immense. Valuable articles not necessary to the preservation of life or for the advancement of the journey and yet clung to thus far, must now be thrown away. The plain is covered with old wagons, clothing, tools, guns, cook stoves (sheet iron) and innumerable articles. After losing four hours in search of our cattle, we went down the river 5 miles, and cut our grass in water knee deep, and full of pit holes. Rather unpleasant.

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August 1.

THIS morning we thought we were entering the long looked for and dreaded waste of 70 miles without water or grass, reaching Mary's River on the one side to Carson's River on the other. Here we rested until 5 minutes before 1, when we commenced our march on Carson's River. This last water is about 30 miles from the Cold Slough but the last available grass is 25 miles back from here.

About 4 miles after entering the desert we came to a salt spring which was the source of many jokes, many being fooled to drink, and then enticing the next weary traveler to try it. We traveled until 15 minutes after 6 p.m. over a good road, then rested

till 6 when again we went on till 12 at night, when we lay by for two hours, feeding and giving our cattle our last water. We fed again at 4 a.m. and at 9:15 a.m.

Reached the hoped-for water.

Many teams were compelled to unhitch and drive the animals to the river, 10, 12 or more miles, for water and then return. The last ten miles of the desert were heavy sand, but sand was frequent at intervals all the way across.

The road across the desert is a picture of misery, being well filled with broken-down wagons, thrown-away goods, and dying horses, mules and cattle. The entire distance without any water is 35 miles, but really 40 miles is destitute of drinkable water.

Today and Friday morning and evening we traveled 45 miles in 30 hours' time.

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August 2.

THE celebrated General Worth train, and also Duncan's mess were compelled to unhitch on the desert, and drive to the river. These trains all condemned us for not driving fast enough. So it goes, up and down. Distance 4 miles.

August 3.

We can see the Sierra Nevada Mountains with their snow-capped peaks. From this onward we anticipate a very severe road. Except in the bottom lands all is dry and barren.

Sunday, August 4.

Today we reached a splendid meadow of great extent, and camped at 3 p.m. to provide for crossing another desert of 26 miles which commences here.

August 5.

After cutting grass for our cattle, we left the meadow at 3 o'clock in the morning so that we might avail ourselves of the coolest part of the day for crossing. We found the road to be much harder on our cattle than that of the Great Desert.

We again reached the river at two miles, encamped at a trading post. There has been discovery of gold among the hills here, and in consequence there are a great many stop here to prospect and work. Flour sells here at \$1.25 per lb., bacon \$1 and almost every other article of food is \$1 per lb.

\*

August 7.

TODAY we were compelled to trade an ox for 25 lbs. of flour, equal to \$25. We have been on short allowance for ten days, so short as to have been about half starved. In traveling I am so weak from need of sufficient food as to be hardly able to keep up with the team.

We are now at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Distance 24 miles in 10½ hours.

August 8.

Today we have been seeing the Elephant. The road today is enough to satisfy anyone that the land route to California is not a bed of roses. We made but 8 miles today, and considered it an excellent day's travel considering how others did, and we expect to see rougher times tomorrow than we have had today.

August 9.

As we thought, this was the day when we saw the Elephant, head, body, and tail. About half past 7 we began to climb the first mountain, and it was astounding what high, rocky, steep hills our cattle did surmount. Sometimes there would appear nothing but a steep base rock, and no foothold for the hoof, but in spite of all our two yoke, Buck and Bright, and Billy and Bob, reached the summit at 11 a.m., a distance of 8 miles. On the evening before I was taken ill with the cholera morbus, and in consequence with my former weak condition from want of food, I found it a hard matter to surmount the steep hills, and had it not been for the kind assistance of James Shields I should certainly have been several hours behind. He cheerfully stayed with me and held me up and with great care aided me in walking.

These mountains are well natured, there being an abundance of lakes, and clear running streams where the thirsty emigrant can quench his thirst. Tonight we camp at the base of the last mountain, which is covered with snow. Distance 15 miles in 10 hours.

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August 10.

REACHED the summit of the last peak at 8 o'clock p.m., and found that we had stretched out before us 30 miles of terrible hard road, to place us again in the level. Today one of our last yoke of cattle (that is, those we started with from home) gave out, and we are compelled to travel with one yoke only. These hills are terrible on the best of cattle.

Today Reisinger, Richie, Huncilman, Rowley, Knight, and McDaniel passed us, having left their teams in the desert and packed on their backs. Thank God we are not yet reduced to that strait, but how soon we may be. He only knows.

Sunday, August 11.

Another clear Sabbath morning in the mountains, and, I hope, the last one we shall spend on the roads. We have yet 40 miles of travel to reach Weaverville, the first town in California we reach, and where we design to stop.

As we near the termination of our route, the number of foot packers becomes truly enormous, many being anxious to reach the goal ahead of others, and leaving behind the goods that may retard their steps, press with vigor on. Others are compelled by necessity to leave their wagons and carry their worldly all on their backs.

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August 12.

TODAY Jim Austin passed us afoot, barefoot singing and in high glee, asserting his intention to beat Dave Lindley into Weaverville, as there was some boasting on Lindley's part as to how much he would be ahead of the New Albany boys.

August 13.

This is the last day's travel we will have as the roads are getting a little better, and we design by God's permission to sleep in Weaverville this night.

8 P.M.

We are in this long desired place where we all look to find our worldly treasure, and to be repaid for all our toil and pain. James Shields and I made our bed in an occupied shed. He retired early while I sat up to talk. Tiring of a long evening's conversation, I went into the shed. Something prompting me to look under my pillow, I did so, and to my horror, a large rattlesnake lay coiled underneath. I gave Jim the alarm, and oh, how we made tracks out of that shed, returning later recruited with clubs,

but our enemy had retired. We then lay down to our first night's sleep in the mines, with large ideas as to what we would do on the coming morrow.

August 14.

Having arrived in the long-sought haven of expected prosperity, to-wit, the mines of California, I have dropped this diary which I have kept from New Albany to the Pacific Slope.

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BEING attacked with the rheumatism in the mines, I determined to go to the City of San Francisco, and if no employment was to be had, then to go home to New Albany.

I accordingly reached San Francisco, on the first day of January, 1851, on a beautiful morning, much like May Day at home. Here I found every line of employment full, and no chance to make a living at my trade (cabinet making). So I engaged a passage to Panama on the Barque Griffin, Halstead master, of Newark, N.J.

This man turned out to be a perfect scoundrel, swindling us out of our passage money, and then feeding us on food not fit for the dogs. The flour which he gave to make our bread had been in the hold of the vessel for two years, and was so moldy that they would dig it out of the barrel with hatchets, and break it on a large board, and then sift it. The meat was rotten, stinking and uneatable. On the officers' table they had fresh Chili Flour and palatable meats.

We passengers finally held an indignation meeting, and demanded to be put off at Neapulco, in Mexico, rather than starve to Panama.

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CAPT. HALSTEAD promised to land us at Neapulco, but knowing there was an American consul there, to whom we intended to present our grievances, he beat on and off for a few days, and then sailed away, saying that the winds were too heavy for him to land, when in fact they would not have blown a setting hen off her nest.

He then ran down to Realejo Creek, where we, in number about a dozen, went ashore with the crew to get fresh water, and took advantage of the chance to go up the creek, or river as they called it, a few miles to Realejo town, where a Spanish consul offered to arrest the scamp, but told us candidly that it would detain us greatly, and if we made no case, would cost us much money.

Under these considerations, we concluded to let him go for the vengeance of a just God, and sent for our baggage, determined to work our way across the country, rather than go farther with him.

Halstead's crew were good enough men, but his name and memory will ever be execrated among us, who made that journey of 30 days down the Pacific Coast with him.

We got a splendid meal here, one article of which was fresh eggs, of which we partook freely, they being plenty and cheap.

Realejo contains about 1,800 inhabitants, houses built of adobe (or mud brick) although many cane built huts were to be seen.

The taverns are kept by Americans. We bid goodbye to the town and its kind people at 2 p.m.



Thus ends abruptly the diary of Alfred [A.] Nunemacher. He had told nothing of gold mining in the California field, but apparently there was nothing of importance to tell. There was no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow which he and his companions from Indiana and Kentucky had wearily followed for four and a half months, across the prairie, the desert and the mountains.

Further hardships were to come after the small band left Realejo, but finally Nunemacher returned home, according to his niece, Miss Elizabeth Nunemacher, New Albany, owner of the diary. He died a respected citizen at a ripe old age – but not a citizen who had been made wealthy by California gold.

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Photographs that were included in the newspaper installments are as follows:

- Alfred Nunemacher, from a photograph made years ago after his return from California.
- James G. Shields . . . “an exception to all men.”
- Conrad Nunemacher, the tailor who staked his son to the trip.
- Will Reisinger . . . who blew the bugle, too.

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- from *Louisville Herald Post* April 25, May 2, May 9, May 16, 1936 (4 installments)