

WASHINGTON BAILEY

A TRIP TO
CALIFORNIA IN
1853

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A Trip to California in 1853 Recollections of a Gold Seeking Trip by Ox Train across the Plains and Mountains by an Old Illinois Pioneer

Brief Biography Of The Author

Washington Bailey, the author of this narrative of a trip to California in 1853, was born October, 1831, in Adams County, Ohio. Afterwards he, with his parents, came to Fountain County, Indiana, from which place he went to California, returning in 1856 to Cheney's Grove, now Saybrook, Illinois.

While in California, he sent money back to his father, who bought for him, fifty acres of land, where Bellflower village now stands, paying \$5.00 per acre. This he sold in 1856, getting \$6.00 per acre. He then bought 85 acres north of Saybrook, adding to it later 40 acres, at a total cost of \$1,400. This was sold in 1864 for \$1,875. The next year he purchased 141 acres in DeWitt County, Ill., where Mike Walden now lives, paying \$22.00 per acre. He purchased more land bordering this farm until 1891, when he moved to LeRoy, where he has since resided in a commodious home south of the city park.

This farm of 261 acres was divided up among his children and afterwards sold. Mr. Bailey later invested in 160 acres in DeWitt County, which he now owns conjointly with his wife, having deeded 80 acres to her. Besides his residence, he owns another residence property in LeRoy.

Mr. Bailey was married to Julian Brittin, March 19, 1857, and they are parents of three boys and three girls, all living. They are: A. G. Bailey, who was serving his second term as mayor of LeRoy, when this volume was published; Henry Bailey, of Normal; Lincoln Bailey and Mrs. Nancy Van Deventer, of LeRoy; Mrs. Sarah Brown, of Maroa, and Mrs. Emma Vance, of Farmer City.

Mr. Bailey has served several terms as justice of the peace and school director. He has been a loyal member of the Methodist church since boyhood. He has a remarkable memory and has always took a lively interest in politics. His mind is a store-house of dates and facts concerning political affairs. He is a staunch foe of the liquor traffic, and holds to the Republican doctrine of McKinley and Roosevelt. He is a man of deep convictions and is always ready to advocate them on all occasions.

Although about 84 years of age as this book goes to press, Mr. Bailey is enjoying good health and goes up town every day to greet old friends and acquaintances. Loved by all his children, respected by the whole community, still enjoying the companionship of his good wife, there are no clouds in the western horizon, and the sundown of his life is radiant with worthy motives and deeds of a three-quarters of a century.

CHAPTER I

UNCLE JOSHUA'S VISIT AND OUR PREPARATIONS FOR THE WEST

In the spring of 1853, my uncle, Joshua Bailey, came from California to Ohio to see his mother and his brothers, uncle John Bailey, and my father, Eben Bailey. But my father had moved to Fountain County, Indiana, so uncle Joshua came through Indiana to see us.

Joshua Bailey had gone to California in 1849, across the plains and had made over one hundred thousand dollars in gold. He hired my brother-in-law, William Reighley, to come out with him from Adams County, Ohio, to Indiana, to buy stock to take across the plains to California. My uncle had bought a span of mules in Ohio. Three of my cousins, William McNeal, Joel Bailey, George Bailey, and a man by the name of Bart Robins, brought the mules and some harness through to Indiana, so William Reighley, uncle Joshua and my cousins, were all together at my father's. My brother, Crawford Bailey, and my self, concluded to go along with them.

Uncle Joshua Bailey had gone to the lead mines when he was a young man, had married and raised his family there. It was from there he had gone to the gold mines. I was twenty-one year old at the time of uncle's visit to our house in Indiana, and it was the first time I had ever seen him.

My uncle poured out a pile of gold coins from a carpet sachel that was lined inside with buck skin and counted out several thousand dollars, enough to buy 250 head of cattle, 1,500 head of sheep and some horses and gave it to William Reighley, to go to Illinois to buy this stock and it did not look like you could hardly miss it out of the pile of gold coins on the table. He gave him more money than would be necessary to buy the stock and my brother, Crawford Bailey and cousin, William McNeal were to take what was left and pay the expense of feeding the stock and their lodging through to Indian Territory, where we were to start across the plains, and what was left, turn it over to uncle.

Wm. Reighley, for his labor buying the cattle and covering his expenses, kept out \$50. He had traveled over 800 miles in coming to Illinois and traveling over Piatt, Macon, DeWitt, Logan, Tazwell and Peoria counties, picking up the stock. When the stock was finally delivered to uncle Joshua, he was well pleased with the judgment William used in the buying.

After uncle had made arrangements for the purchase of the stock, he went back to Wisconsin to his family and made preparations to move to California to make his home. After William Reighley had bought the stock in Illinois, he went with the boys as far as the Illinois River and then returned to Ohio. While the stock was being bought, I, with two other young men, were making preparations to go and overtake them. We had rented some land and had to dispose of that and sell some grain and some horses before starting.

We were to meet the advance party at Independence, Mo., but when we were ready to start, heavy rains had set in and we were much delayed by swollen streams. At many places we had to swim our horses as there were but few bridges. We had to go out of the way ten miles at Danville, in order to get across the Vermillion River. When we got to Peoria, we learned that the roads were so bad that we took passage on a steam boat down the Illinois River to St. Louis. There we took passage up the Missouri River to Independence, Mo., where we expected to find the men with the stock.

After reaching Independence and waiting several days, we were not able to hear anything of uncle or of the drove which he was driving through from Wisconsin. We learned that there were other places from which the overland trains started for the West. One was St. Joe, about eighty miles up the river, and two of my party went to St. Joe, while I remained at Independence. By watching at St. Joe and Independence, we expected to meet the train as we knew that we must be ahead of them.

The men at St. Joe happened to run across uncle, who had been in St. Louis to buy supplies for the trip. They wrote me and I left for St. Joe.

We told uncle that he had instructed the men who were driving stock through from Illinois, to go to Independence, but he did not understand it that way. He had instructed his family and the men who were bringing the stock from Wisconsin, to go to Cainsville, Iowa, which was twenty-five miles above Council Bluffs on the Missouri River, and about 150 miles from St. Joe. Uncle bought a yoke of oxen and a wagon at St. Joe and he and I started for Cainsville.

After we were in Cainsville for several days, the family and party, with the horses, wagons and cattle, came from Wisconsin. In the party, were Peter Hughs, his brother-in-law and family, William Nailer, Thomas Roberts, John Teril, Allen Gilber, Horace Failling, Thomas Brooks, John Brooks and James Creek.

We remained there for two or three weeks, hoping to hear from the drove from Illinois. Uncle finally came to the conclusion that he had told them to go to Independence, Mo., and he sent Jobe Spray to St. Joe to see if he could find trace of them. He was given money to buy a horse and saddle, and in case they had crossed the river at St. Joe, he was to follow and overtake them, in order to get the two parties together. When he reached St. Joe, he found that they had crossed there and later learned that when crossing the Missouri, that they had stopped to shear the sheep, and on finding that Independence was south of the direct line, they had made directly for St. Joe and had crossed the river before Jobe had arrived. On account of the misunderstanding, uncle, with his party, was above Council Bluff on the east side of the Missouri, and the Illinois party was somewhere on the west side of the river in what is now Kansas.

I was with the party at Cainsville, when an incident happened which I never will forget. We were waiting for word from Jobe Spray, and uncle and all the party except one other man and myself had left the camp and gone to Cainsville. We were left to herd the cattle. While in the town, uncle met a man who owned a farm near the camp. They rode out as far as the camp together, and as uncle's horse was a little thin, having been ridden through from Wisconsin, and the farm was but a short distance away, he picketed out the horse, took off the saddle and threw it away far enough so that the horse could not reach it. He proceeded on foot to the man's farm.

From where I was herding, I could see the horse and went down, thinking that some of the party had come back from Cainsville, and that I would be able to get something to eat as I was very hungry. When I got to the camp, I saw that it was uncle's horse, but could not see anything of uncle. I started back to the cattle when I discovered the saddle in the grass with a two-bushel sack tied to the horn of the saddle. I was interested to know what was in the sack, thinking it might be crackers, so I gave the sack a kick with the toe of my boot. There was a jingling sound as if there were ox shoes and nails in it. So to satisfy my curiosity, I untied the sack from the saddle, ran my hand into it and took out, to my great surprise, a handful of gold. Tying up the sack, I looked in all directions for uncle, but could not see him. I called out for him as loud as I could, three or four time, but received no answer.

After waiting for quite awhile, I took the sack and hid it under some clothing and bedding in the bottom of one of the covered wagons. I then went to a high point near the cattle where I could watch both, the cattle and the wagon.

Along in the afternoon, the folks returned from Cainsville, and my mind was relieved, as I knew there was no further danger of prowlers. My helper and myself, gathered up the stock, and when we got into camp, it was dark and I was hungrier than I had ever been before in my life.

"Come to supper," was a welcome shout and the thought of the gold had vanished. While eating, I heard uncle call out to some of the men:

"Did you see anything of a sack on my saddle horn?"

Several of the men answered, "No," before I could get my mouth emptied and when my vocal canal was free from congestion, I holloed,

"I saw a sack on the horn of your saddle," and he answered back,

"All right Wash," and I told him to wait until I had my supper and I would be over and get it for him.

I went to the camp fire where the men were huddled and asked uncle where he had been and he said that he had walked to the farm across the fields. I asked him how much was in the sack and replied, "Thirty-six thousand Dollars."

I went to the wagon and got the sack. Uncle was badly scared and remarked that it was the most careless trick that he had ever done. There were some Mormons camped a short distance away and he said that if they had found the sack, that he would have been ruined.

While waiting at Cainsville, we finally received word from Jobe Spray that the Illinois party had crossed the river at St. Joe and had proceeded on west and that he would follow them, they having crossed the river two weeks before he got there. He had followed day and night and overtaken them about half way between St. Joe and Fort Kearney, which would be about 150 miles from St. Joe. After receiving the letter, we began to make arrangements to cross the Missouri River. The steam ferry boat had gone up the river after furs, so we had no way to get our stock and wagons across.

While waiting, a fur boat came down the river with three men. This boat was strictly a home made affair. It was built of rough sawed lumber and the bottom and sides were nailed onto the frame with several thicknesses of boards and caulked up with buffalo tallow to keep it from leaking too badly. We secured this boat to get us across.

The process of getting that old boat across the river was a difficult one and as it only could take sixteen cattle at a time, many trips had to be made. A round trip across the river, meant much labor, and was as follows:

After the cargo was put in the boat, it had to be hauled by ropes and pushed by pike poles up the river along the bank, until we were above an island which was in the middle of the river. Then we would cast off from the shore and by means of the oars, pulled for the opposite shore. The current, however, would take the boat in a diagonal direction so we would strike the lower end of the island. Then we would pull and push the old ark to the upper end of the island and again cast loose and finally reach the shore at a point much lower, being carried along with the current. In order to get back, we would drag the boat along the west shore to above the island again and cast off, reaching the lower end of the island. Dragging the boat along the shore to the upper end of the island and crossing, finally reach the east side below the camp. After two weeks of hard work, we managed to ferry all the stock and camp outfit across without serious accident.

CHAPTER II

ON THE WESTERN PLAINS – SOME OF OUR EXPERIENCES

When we reached the other side, we were in Indian territory, or what is now known as Nebraska, and a short distance north from where Omaha now is. At this place, uncle Joshua impressed on our minds the danger of an attack by the Indians and told us to make plenty of bullets and have our guns well loaded to protect ourselves. Up to this time, I had seen only two Indians. One of them was a squaw named Gripteth, on this side of the Wabash River in Warren County, Indiana. The other one I came upon lying in the grass south of Cainsville, wrapped up in a red blanket. The way uncle talked I thought that we would have to fight our way through. The imagination pictured out every bunch of grass or object in the distance as Indians, but coming closer, we found that we were always unnecessarily alarmed. The scare over meeting Indians gradually wore off, and when we came to the Indians, or rather, when they came to us, I was not as afraid of them as I was of the wolves.

We followed the Indian trail until we came to the Elkhorn River and there we crossed on a willow brush bridge. These bridges lay flat on the water and I did not find out how they were fastened to the banks. Before we reached California, we had crossed over several of them.

We kept a southwest course, following the trail and reached the Platte River, which we followed on the north side. We had traveled about 200 miles in Nebraska. We heard cannons firing and we knew that we were near Fort Kearney and that they were celebrating the Fourth of July.

Uncle Joshua, on a fine bay blooded mare which he had brought from Wisconsin, forded the river after a life and death struggle with the treacherous quick sands along the banks, and managed, by wading and swimming the horse, to get across the river.

After arriving on the opposite bank, he waved his hat in token of his success and started for the fort. He carried with him a seven shot Colts rifle and a five caliber Colts revolver. When uncle reached Fort Kearney, as we afterwards learned, he found that the Illinois train had passed through there two weeks before. Uncle took up the trail and after following for ten days, he overtook them on the south side of the North Platte, a short distance on this side of Fort Laramie near the Wyoming-Nebraska line, at a place called Ash Hollow. The river was forded and the cattle, sheep and horses were now on the right bank of the river.

The night after uncle had left the camp, we were camped near the river on some ground which was level and smooth. Aunt and her two children, Henry and Ellen, were with her in one of the tents. During the night there was a heavy rain or water spout. I was lying on the ground with my boots and coat under my head, and I was awakened by the water which had partly covered my body. I heard aunt crying and calling: "Where is Henry? I can't find Henry."

I started to go to her and got into deeper water and realized the water was raising very fast. I reached aunt, who was holding the little girl in her arms and she was hysterical about the boy. I heard a splash and following the direction of the sound in the darkness, I got my hand on his head and lifted him out of the water. I took aunt and the children to a covered wagon, where we stayed until morning. The water had raised until it was two and one-half feet deep, when it began to go down and by morning it was all gone. We were not able to understand where so much water came from so quickly or where it had gone, as the river was about a mile from the camp.

We broke camp and trailed on westward on the north side of the river, and after several days, we met uncle, who was returning from overtaking the Illinois train. He had halted them at Ash Hollow, near Fort Laramie. We finally reached their camp and for the first time after about a thousand miles' travel, the two trains were united.

It will be remembered that the junction place was to be Independence, Missouri, but the meeting place turned out to be in the borders of Wyoming. The two herds made 1500 sheep and 500 cattle and we were on the borders of the rough and tumble freaks of nature near the foot hills of the great Rockies.

After we had passed Fort Kearney in the month of July, we saw great herds of Buffalo going north. At times as we looked across the Platte River, we could see countless numbers of them and the earth would be black with them for miles. The droves would travel in "V" shape, with the leaders at the point. When a drove would cross the river toward us, it was necessary to use the utmost care in order that our cattle would not stampede. We would herd our cattle up close and get out with our guns and by shooting and holloing, we were able to turn the buffalo in a direction away from our cattle.

We came to high grounds, once, where there was excellent grazing and we stopped there for the day, to let the cattle and stock take advantage of the good grass. While we were eating our dinner, two Indians came riding up, with two of the finest spotted ponies I had ever seen. They got off and were holding them with a sort of a lariat, as they had no bridles, when Bart Robins, one of the men with us, made the Indians understand by signs, that he wanted to ride one of the ponies.

He mounted one of them and rode away to round some of the cattle which were straying. When Bart first started off, they did not care, but when they saw him circle away from the main herd, they evidently thought that he was running away with it, and one of them jumped on the other pony, fixed an arrow to his bow and started in pursuit. By yelling as loud as we could, we attracted the attention of Bart and motioned for him to circle back to camp. By keeping a circle, he kept out of shooting distance of the bow, and arrived in camp safe, but somewhat frightened over his experience. The Indians got on their ponies and left.

Two or three days after this incident, a chief and about twenty of his tribe, came to us and after a pow-wow, they sat down in a row and uncle understanding the maneuver, had as many of the men sit down facing them, as there were Indians. The chief lit his tomahock pipe, took a puff, passed it to uncle, who did the same. The order pursued, was that the chief would hand it to one of the Indians; the pipe would be returned to him, and he would hand it to uncle, who would give it to one of the men, who would return it to uncle, and uncle would give it back to the chief. The order was maintained until all the men and Indians had a puff at the pipe. When the program was over, the chief arose and said, "How!" and he and the Indians took their departure. This was the "pipe of peace" and meant that they would do us no harm, and we were not to harm them. Evidently this visit was to clear up the misunderstanding concerning the pony incident.

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