

## **Journal of William Gordon Miller**

**Written after his arrival in California in 1852**

**Transcribed by Margaret Wooden.**

I left home on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of April, got to St. Louis about the 10<sup>th</sup>, leyd in our supplies, shipped them to St. Joe, left there the 12<sup>th</sup>, crossed the Mo. River at St. Charles. Traveled up the north side of the Mo. River to St. Joe. which point we reached about the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. We crossed the Missouri River in a Steam ferry boat on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May. Through many years of wandering and all the mining excitement that ever witnessed, I all ways looked back on St. Joe. as being the liveliest place that I ever was in. To give you an ideah of the great rush to California we started early on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> to cross the river, got with in about one hundred yards of the river, when and found the road blocked the entire width of the street \_\_\_\_ there to the water edge with waggons and teames, many of which (especially those which had got on the hill-side) had been there all the proceeding night. Ox, Horse and mule teams together with loose stock all crowded into a sollid mas. As soon as the boat would arrive, the living Dam would commence moving, and move up slowly untill the boat was full and then stop and wait untill she returned for another load. We had not been there long untill the road was filled up behind us for a long way back, and there was weight enough behind to make it impossible for us to stand still if we had been disposed to. The boat done good work and we crossed the river four P.M. and left the hillside covered with waggons. We traveled out across the bottom four miles and camped our first night, in the (at that time) Indian territory. The next day we fell in with five teams from Coles County. Old man Skidmore and his son, and two other men, two Fowler Brothers and three other men completed the second team. Two Jeffers Brothers, Bill Ewing and one other man whose name I have forgotten completed the members of the third waggon. Two Cox Brothers, Silsby, Dallas and Jack Cartwright the fourth. Parker, Huffiner, Tyler and Atti\_?\_ the fifth. (Henry was well acquainted with all of them, and gave them a recommendation as being a set of first rate fellows. But the company was too large, and in that company there was some dirty dogs, still I am able at the present time to look with more leniency on their wrong doings than I was for many years after. They were forming large companies for mutual protection against the Indians. They were looking to numbers for safety. But I believe to

day that I could pick ten men out of that company of twenty five men that one Indian could have captured the ten or scared the life out of them either.

Every thing went on pretty well for a few days or while all hands were well and no one required help. But alas for the selfishness of human nature as I have often found since the formation of that company. (Here I will say I have examined sevrel maps for diferent streames which we crossed but donot find them at least not by the names they were known by at that time.) We passed the Iowa Indian Mission near as I can reccollect thirty miles from St. Joe. Soon after we crossed a stream called Minnaha, about the sise of the North Fork. Here Old Mr. Skidmore was taken sick. The next day reached Big Blue a stream about the sise of the Embarrass River. Skidmore quite sick some talk of laying by with him but he expressed a decided prefference t go on said he thought he would sooner be buried on Little Blue which we expected to reach in one days travle, accordingly we hitched up and drove on, reached Little Blue that night. Next morning he was a great deal worse. We did not move that day. Day following he was no better growing weaker. We were all laying still, about ten a.m. young Skidmore said he was going to stay there untill the Old man died or got better, and then he said they had a good team and he was going to make up for lost time. We told him we did not want to rush our team, they were all young and not in vary good order, and the grass not vary good. He said if we did not want to rush we had better drive on. So we hitched up and three of the teams went with us. The Fowler Brothers stayed with Skidmore. We never saw them after. (I met one of the Fowler Boys in California, he had a woful tale to tell, Skidmore died, they pushed their teams broke them down. Young Skidmore died, they fell out among themselves scattered and made their way into California some one way and some another.) Little Blue is about sise of Big. Traveled up it some four or five days. Griggs and Heath both taken down sick next day after leaving Skidmore, and Henry the day following. They had the colera. The night after Henry was taken sick two of the waggons left as Jefers and Coxes, drove about four miles from us and camped they were more fearful of colera than of the Indians. Parker, Huffhines, Tyler and Atkins stayed with us. For they had not energy to leave they were so worthless it would have been a wilful waste of powder and lead enough to kill them unless you could have got them in range and killed them all with one bullet. I could get no help from any of them, when I

would cook if they could get me a way from camp long enough they would eat what I had cooked, and I might go hungry or cook more. I had the team to drive, yoke and unyoke, had to mind them while they fed, drive them in at night and guard them until they would lay down. (We learned our team to lay down at the waggon when we first started out.) Then I was up every night with Henry. We was very low came near leaving his remains on Little Blue. I will here mention one incident which occurred the night after Henry was taken sick. The other teams had left us and were camped off the main road about four miles from us. About one O'clock at night as near as I could judge Bill Ewing came to our waggon. He had left his company, stole away from them in the dark, and come to see how Henry was. I was setting up with him at the time. He appeared in trouble and condemned the actions of his company. Talked of leaving them, but said his means was all invested in the outfit. He stayed two hours and went back told to say nothing of the visit if I should chance to meet any of them. They drove on next morning. I never saw any of them except Ewing and the other man until I met the Jeffers Boys in Sierra county. (More of the Cox Brothers and Ewing here after.) The country which we traveled until we left the Little Blue, reminds one very much of portions of North Western Mo. only the prairie is more hilly and less timber. On Little Blue I saw the last Hickory timber that I ever saw growing. After leaving Blue struck high rolling sand hills. Had to look for grass in the low ground. We reached Platt or what is now known as Nebraska River about the 20<sup>th</sup> of May. Struck the river a few miles below Fort Kearney. The boys were all mending fast. Griggs and Heath were able to do their part in a great measure. One thing I can say for them they were ever ready and willing to do their part when they were able. I don't believe that better men than they were ever traveled that road. We stopped one day at Fort Kearney, unpacked, and dried our goods. Henry was able to be up, had to keep a continual watch on him to keep him from killing himself eating. There was about fifty men stationed at the fort. Fort stands close on the river, on low land. I don't know whether it has retained its name through all the Kansas troubles and the Rebellion. We left the fort traveled up the river twelve miles at which point a - - great many were crossing. The grass was said to be better on the north side of the river. They were fording the river one and one quarter mile wide. We saw many teams in the river, they said the crossing was good. We raised our waggon bed and crossed the same

day after leaving the Fort. Water was from one to three feet deep and so muddy that it looked thick. I had to wade the river and drive the team, did not think it would answer for the other boys to get wet. About halfway across Parkers team become unmanageable. They give them up and come to where I was stoped waiting for them. Said they might go, as they wanted an excuse to go home. Team went off down the river about fifty yards and stoped. I went and brought them back and after bothering with them for some time I took all of our three lead yoke of lead cattle and hauled them across, left our waggon stand in the water. They went ashore with me after they got out they said they were out of the water, and they would stay out, and their team should not go back after our waggon. I pretended to pay no attention to the talk went and unhooked three yoke of their oxen and went and hauled our waggon out. The water was very cold and I had been in it between three and four hours. After I got out that company and me had some altercations, I give them to understand that I would travel no further with them. We drove on about four miles and camped. Next morning about sunrise I was taken sick. Cramp in the stomache and vomiting followed shortly after with fever. There was two weeks lost to me entirely. That was the beginning of a hard spell of sickness which came near ending my earthly career. But that Lord who brought me into existence was not ready to let me depart. I had some thing to do there was many other hardships and trials in reserve for me as you will see if I ever finish the account of my travles for you. The morning I was taken sick I saw seven Buffalow on the sand hill on the north of Plat River. The first we had seen and the only ones that I saw they were at least ten miles distant. We could see them perfectly plain, and they looked to be fifteen feet high and large in proportion. It was vary strange to me at that time that they should look so large at so great a distance, but I have seen the same thing many times since and learned that it was something in the atmosphere which caused a mirage. Some places it magnifies objects, yet the observer is able to tell that the object is a great way off. At other times it magnifies and brings the object close to you. You may take an object, say a mountain for instance, start towards it, you will think on starting it is but a few hundred yards distant. I have known instances where men have traveled day and at night the object would appear further off than when they started, and they had started with the expectation of accomplishing the walk in a few minutes. Platte River runs through a perfectly level

plain, many places thirty to forty miles wide. The lower part of the river when you cross the level plain, you come to sand hills, as you go further up the hills become more rocky. The grass was pretty good where it was not killed by Alkali springs. We traveled five hundred miles without seeing a stick of timber or shrub of a woody nature except sage brush, and a good deal of the way the sage brush was scarce. We had to use Buffalow Chips as a substitute for wood. We could see Larimies Peak and Chimney Rock, vary plain for three weeks before we got to them. At all times we could see waggons of all descriptions as far as the eye could reach ahead and behind us together with drove of lose stock. In starting out many noviceses who knew little or nothing of what a team could stand, would dash by us under whip with horse and mule teams. They would bid us good bye and tell us they did not expect to see us any more untill we got to California, but as we begun to approach what was known at that time as the black hills, we passed them in every grassy spot leying by to recruit their teams. The scale was entirely turned we was able to bid them farewell untill we should meet in the land of Gold. My sketch on this part of the journey must necessariially be vary imperfect as I have to take most of it from what I was told, and have entierly lost dates. Well when I began to know any thing Parker and his company were there to annoy me. I would abuse them but they looked over it on account of me being sick. When we was at Fort Larimy we fell in with a Doctor who poured Murcury down me and salivated me untill I could have picked the last tooth out of my head with my fingers. Here we first met the Sioux Indians. They were friendly to a fault, a filthy naked half starved set of beggars. We was among them for sevrel days. Soon after leaving Fort Larime we left Plat River and turned into the back hills. They consist of a range of mountains covered with broken fragments of loose lavy rock which is terrible on animals feet. There was one day while riding over those hills in the waggon I was so weak and the waggon jolt so in going down hill that it was a hard struggle for me to keep soul and body together, lost my breath several times and all ways thought I would have died that day if I had not been watching for the Doctor who salivated me with a six shooter. After three or four days in these hills we reached Sweetwater one of the head brances of Platt river. We struck Sweetwater close to Independence Rock. Looks as if it was a detached boulder laying on the plain, it is an oval shape four or five hundred feet in diametor and rises about that much above the

surface. Camped close to the rocks, and close to what is, or was known as Devils Gate. Which is a deep cut in the solid rock about four hundred yards long, and as many feet deep, twelve or fifteen feet across the top, forming one of the greatest chasm I ever saw. Sweetwater rushed through there like a torrent. We were not at so great an altitude, getting so near the summit of the Rocky Mountains, though sometimes in June the weather was quite cool, frost pretty much every night. We traveled up Sweet water a few days. Crossed over the summit of the Rocky Mountains about the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June. But at that time I scarcely realized that I was passing over a dividing line where the water flowed in different directions, and into two great oceans. Traveled on descending ground for a few miles, came to a stream called Big Sandy. Some water standing in holes but none running in the stream. Camped here, grass not very good but the last we would find for forty miles. Camped near the junction of the Salt Lake road. Started early in the morning. Took what was known as Sublits Cutoff and went 75 miles north of Salt Lake city. The next day we layed by and day following we struck Green River. Traveled nearly all day down the mountains. Followed up the river a few miles, came to a Ferry kept by some Mormans. They told us we could cross next day, when our turn came. They come out and numbered our waggon. They would ferry the waggon and one yoke of oxen, the remainder we had to swim, our number was 184. Charged us seven dollars. We crossed next day at sun set. Green River is about as large as Embarrass River below the North Fork and runs vary rappid at this point. Then we had a hard days drive up the mountain. Traveled one day on or near the summit, day following went down the mountain on Bear River. I think this was the worst mountain we had encountered so far. I was well nigh worn out, I was not able to walk without help. We traveled down Bear River for some days, I donot know how long, but we reached Soda Springs about noon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of July. Camped the remainder of the day. These springs are quite a curiosity, three of them in number. Each spring has a mound probably forty feet at the base, raise in the hight of fifteen or twenty feet the water comes up in the center. There is a difference in the water each spring having different taste. They are close together. There was plenty of Indians. The first we had seen since we left the Sioux. A kind of trading post, Gambling house and Black Smith shop all combined. We passed through some pretty good looking valleys on Bear River. Some spots the musquitoes were worse

than I ever saw them any where before or since. At other points there was millions of grasshoppers, there we found them there was no green vegetation left, but as a general thing we had good grass on Bear River. From our camp we could have a view of the Steamboat Spring one mile further down the river, about every five minutes it would throw out a large volume of water which would leap from the mountain side and roll off into Bear River. The next day we sloped and examined it the discharges come at regular intervals. During the intervals there was a rumbling gurgling sound which grew louder and louder untill all of a sudden there would severl barrels of water appear to bound from the fishure in the rock and jet out twenty or thirty feet and roll off about fifty feet down the hill into Bear river. After the discharge there would be a moments calm. The morning of the fourth went four miles down the river to where the Fort Bridger road turns off at which point our road leaves the river. At which point we broke the forward axel tree to our waggon. So we spent our fourth on Bear River. The river at this point is about the sise of the North Fork. By reference to the map you will see it empties into Great Salt Lake from whence it has no outlet unless it finds some subteranian pass. Well as I said we camped here and had I been able I could have had pretty good opportunity to examine the picturesque and strange country, as it was I will have to confine myself to what I could see from the camp. From appearences the immediate vacinity of our has at no vary remote age been an awful scene of burning. There is hundreds of fishures and holes, where the subteranian fires have broken through, many of them are open to the depth of thirty feet, the walls burnt to cinder giving them the appearance of ruins where the smoke was not yet effaced. The ground covered with cinders which look fresh as if they had just been thrown from a forge. The grass not vary good country too rough and rocky. We found plenty of wild currents of as fine variety and as large as I ever saw grow in the gardens. There was black currents, red and white if not growing on the same bush, they were growing in the same bunch of bushes. All hands went to work took our waggon to pieces converted the hind wheels into a cart, cut the bed down to make it. Packed the goods and put me in on top, a few words and I will drop the cart, of all the despisable things to ride on over a rough road, I am convinced that cart should take precidence, I thought it would shurly be the death of me, Oh! how I wanted to walk, but I could span my arm or leg any place except the joints. We had passed many waggons standing by the

road-side, how I wished we had left our waggon and taken one of them. Here let me remark the road was lined with fragments of waggons, Harness, Ox yokes, Chanes of all sises and descriptions, provisions, Blankets, clothing, cooking utensils of all kinds, in fact everything which constituted an outfit for California except whiskey. I guess the emigrants were afraid to leave whiskey lest the Indians might hold of it.

The morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> we put our cart in motion early. Traveled 20 miles over rough, ragged, rocky, desolate looking mountainous country, and camped that night on Hams Fork of Bear River, good grass, splendid water and plenty of Willow fire-wood. He have found no timber yet except a species of Red cedar which grows on the mountain sides on the bare rocks it is small and scrubby but makes good fire-wood.. The next day we crossed over what known as Bear River and Goose Creek Mountains. Had a snow storm on the mountain. Camped on Goose Creek, and had a white frost. Grass good. Frost does not seem to effect the grass in these mountains Vallies. Traveled up Goose Creek untill noon when we turned and crossed the mountain, and camped that night in what is known as thousand spring valley, so named from the great number of springs around and over the Valley. There was the first hot spring that we had seen, and cold springs close to them. There was Sulphur Spring and Soda Springs. In fact springs enough in one half mile square to give employment to a Chemist for a month defining the properties of the water taken from different springs.

In this valley we met the Emigrants who come by Salt Lake. We left here and traveled on the divide between the head waters of Humboldt or Maries River, and Snake River for two days and then turned down on Humboldt. The stream was small where we first struck it. The water was good and grass plenty. Our team was in fine condition and able to make 20 or 25 miles a day. Soon after we reached Humboldt we found a good two horse waggon standing by the side of the road, left our cart and took it. That was the last two wheeled vehicle I ever had any thing to do with. Some of Parkers team died, they fought among themselves. We traded Huffhines a pony for his oxen. We helped Atkinson into California, Parker and Tyler got in with some parties to help drive horse stock. About the second day after this breaking up we fell in with the Cox Brothers. The Jeffers boys and them only traveled together a few days. (We traveled with them untill we sold our team.) Day or two later Bill Ewing over took us. He was on horse back and

appeared in a great hurry to reach the mines. The Jeffers Boys and him had a row. He said they were at least three hundred miles behind us. We traveled past pretty much all the teams now that we saw had crossed the Missouri River before us had. The roads were awful dusty and the weather getting very hot and a good deal of alkali, and the water getting worse every day. Passed one desert where there was neither grass nor water for thirty-five miles. Traveled untill one o'clock at night. We reached the sink of Humboldt about the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July. At the sink it is as large as the Embarrass River at its mouth. It sinks and entirely disappears in the sandy desert or great basin between the Rocky and Sierra Nevada Mountains. At the sink the water is brackish, salty and vary unhealthy for men and animals. One yoke of our oxen got alkilied in two days time they went from beef cattle to skeletons. Here we found a Government Store sent here for the relief of any one who may need help. I presume they would help any one who had no money. We got some things of them for which they charged a sound sum. I have been walking some every day since we have been on Humboldt, about 250 miles from where we first struck it to the sink. We have a sandy dezert of 49 miles, no green vegetation and no water untill we reach Carson River.

There has been a great deal of sickness and a great many deaths. Many poor fellows left their bones on this road, few of them suffered what I did, I was face to face with the monster for hundreds of miles. I have many times asked why it was I was spared. When we cross the dezert we consider the hard part of our journey over. We reached the sink about 2 p.m. camped untill 11 a.m. following day, when we started on the dezert. We started at 11 o'clock with the expectation of getting there by the following morning. The weather vary hot. This is one place where sage brush does not do well. There is no living thing here, neither vegeatable, nor animal. Before night we commenced finding animals that had died every year since the emigration first started to California. The carcas would lay and dry up undesturbed by birds, worms or any thing else. I have an idea the atmosphere is pure, I am shure it is awful hot. I rode in the waggon untill dark, then in order to lighten the load much as possible I walked all night and untill ten next morning before I reached Carson River. The teams got in a head of me an hour and a half. About midnight we came to a camp where they had water to sell which they had hauled from Carson River. They sold at 50 cts a quart. We bought \$10 worth and gave a

little to each of our oxen. That was the best water I ever tasted although I donot know how long it had been standing in barrels. The two that were alkilied are able to follow behind the waggon. At sunrise we could see low sand hills ahead of us and we were sinking in the sand near a foot every step. We struck the deep sand twelve miles from Carson River. The sun rose hot and the two sick oxen commenced falling behind. I was pretty well give out too, so I stayed with them. The other boys went on with the team. We was now a long way behind. Passed several head of stock in this deep sand which had been left to die that morning, but I kept ours up and kept them moving, but within two miles of the river they left me and were soon out of sight. When I got to the river the teams were still standing about the middle of the river and appeared perfectly contented. Here we found a good many traders who had come out from California to speculate off the emigrants. Most of them had whiskey to sell and some of them had tents streched and kept eating establishments. We bought some fresh beef, paid 25 cts. per Lb. for it. Camped here, turned our stock on fine grass, kept on drinking untill we were satisfied that the water was not salty. Had something to eat and went to bed under the shade of cotonwood trees. The first trees we had seen for many miles. Had a good rest.

After sleeping half a day and all night we felt refreshed. Carson River is a little larger than Humboldt. Heads in the Sierra Nevada mountains, and sinks in the Great Basin or Sandy Dezert. About forty miles north of here is Truckey River, and about the same distance south is Walkers River. All about the same size, all emptying in to the great basin and finding a subterainan out let. I thought when we reached Carson River that we had found almost a Paradise as compared with Lower Humboldt, the inference is not much out of the way. We started next morning and traveled up the river, had pretty good grass, was in no particular hurry. I was gaining fast and our team was recruiting. The roads along the river were pretty good, not so dusty as on Humboldt. We left the largest portion of the Emmigration at the Sink of Humboldt. They were going the Truckey route. The mountains in the distance have a vary sombre appearence. Some of them are covered with a specie of red cedar, but by far the larger portions of them the bare rocks are exposed, entirely destitute of any green vegetation. In these mountains there is plenty of mountain sheep. We did not hunt.

Every day much the same, few incidents of note, one hundred and fifty miles from

where we struck Carson River we came to what was known as Carson Canon. Where we saw the first mining. Some of the men shewed us some gold dust. What was known as Carson Canon was where the mountain come close to the river and a deep gorge in the mountain. They were placer mines and located on each side of the Canon. These mines have been worked extensively since then. Being in the immediate vacinity of the Washo or Nevada Silver Mines, and close to the famous Virginia City and Gold Hill. Fifty miles from here we reached the old Mormon Station, (what is now Carson City). Here was some large log houses and a large farm. They had vegetables of nearly all kinds and they kept a kind of provision store. We arrive here the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> of Aug. We are now at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and in full view of the heavy pine forrest. We stoped here that day. It was thought our waggons would not stand to go over the mountains. The morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> sold our team, five yoke for \$250. Made preperations for walking over the mountains to Hangtown (Since called Placerville) distance by the foot trail one hundred and ten miles.