

D I A R Y

of

Armeda Jane Parker

This is the diary of Armeda Jane (Lesh) Parker, wife of Francis Taylor Parker, written while crossing the plains from Pawnee City, Nebraska, to Yakima, Washington territory.

The family who made the trip consisted of Armeda and "Frank" Parker and their children Clarence, Orlando, Harlie, Alice, Mabel and Ethylyn.

The eldest of the children, Ella, was married and had gone to Washington territory with her husband, David Warren Stair, and the glowing accounts of the new country, sent by them, determined the move of the remaining members of the family.

This account of the trip was copied from the diary and was typed and bound through the efforts of Alice Armeda (Parker) Carter, daughter of Frank and Armeda Parker.

Transcribed 1918.

1878 -

- April 28 - Pawnee City, Nebraska to Washington territory. Left Mr. Moss at 8 o'clock this morning in company with Miss Priscilla Bobinmyer- left Viola Moss very ill.
- 29 - Stayed at Mr. Prowant's; spent a very pleasant evening with them. Started at 7 for Beatrice. Travelled over some beautiful prairie, mostly unsettled. Beatrice is a lively town. Bid Mr. Prowant goodbye and drove on. Went into camp two miles west of Beatrice in a nice little ravine. Lariatd the horses and mules, and one mule cut its foot very badly.
- 30 - It is raining as we drive out this morning - mule lame. Camped at Mr. Hedges, 12 miles east of Alexandria. It rained nearly all night but our tent did not leak so we got along nicely; got breakfast a little late and had a little fright caused by our little girl Alice, nine years of age, falling from the wagon; caught her dress on the ax handle as she was in the act of jumping - it being in the feed box in front of the wagon, whirled it over and struck her between the shoulders, or rather on the left shoulder, but did not hurt her seriously we think.
- May 1 - Allie's back is pretty sore. Rained all last night. This is a beautiful country to travel in but not so well settled as we expected to see it.
- 2 - Belvidier. Stopping over here our mule was so lame. It rained some and blew our tent almost over today. We had to abandon it and all got a bath.



There are two families who just drove into town and intended to go to Oregon. We will have company. The little girls have to go to bed early as it is so windy that our oil stove doesn't warm our tent much but we manage with it, to keep enough food cooked to satisfy us. Belvedier is situated on the sandy which is a fine stream of soft water.

May 3 - Stayed at Belvedier again last night. Had a pleasant call from the milliner of this place. Miss Holmes and three other ladies. Clarence, our oldest son, started early this morning with the mule; it is still very lame. We stopped till it was rather late on account of bread baking; was cold last night and frosted the water; tastes a little alkaline to us and the wells are all bored ones and this county is noted for wind mill pumps.

There are fire breaks on either side of the R. R. tracks. I write while we travel; the road is so level that the little girls have the sugar box for a table and play they have a little dinner with crackers and their table is not shaken over.

The prairie is clothed with nothing except grass - not even red root as in Eastern Nebraska.

We are now at Edgar in Kunkles County. We do not see such large herds of stock as in Pawnee and Gage Counties.

4 - Camped by Edgar. We carry water in our kegs not because it cannot be got by digging but because the settlers are mostly back from the R. R. and we follow that. We pass a great many sod houses. The prairie is very level and it looks beautiful to see the fields of

small grain. There is not much corn planted this season but we see a corn sheller run by wind mill and large piles of cobs, showing there has been corn raised. We are now watering our teams in Fairfield, Clay County. The well is 110' deep. We find all very liberal with water wherever we stop. This is a fine location. The reader will bear in mind that we write as we travel along. We passed Davenport yesterday. There is the last timber we expect to see for 60 miles. This looks as though it might be the Great American Desert with the exception of plenty of grass.

At Fairfield there are great ricks of wood but I don't know where they get it as there is no timber in sight, but on from town those who burn wood for fuel burn nothing but old R. R. ties. And still the windmills stand above the horizon in every direction. This Cloud County seems to be in advance of Thayer and Kunkalls Counties. We can see farms in all directions, well set to timber, mostly maple, ash and box alder with considerable cottonwood. Will camp for noon soon but can't see much need of it as the road is so smooth and level it seems as if one might just travel on and on. The grass is short and thin here on account of there being so much alkali. They have no fire breaks in Clay County. Just nooned and passed Glenville, a prairie town or Railroad station.

5 - We lay over Sunday at Hastings. It is the largest town we have yet passed. Is a great lumber shipping



town.. The most lumber is shipped from here of any place we have been in. There is something ailing the horses in this locality. They have just hauled off another carcass and there are several others in sight. We will not stay here any longer than we must.

- 6 - We stayed at Hastings until this Monday morning. The mule no better but traveling slowly. The wells here are bored as there is no stone of any kind to wall a well. I neglected to state we had a pleasant call from some of the Hastings people. Among them was Mr. Gus Rice, Mr. and Mrs. Walker, Mr. and Mrs. Bronson, our Pawnee Phrenology lecturer. He lectured in March '78.

Half way between Hastings and Jutiralta we find good water - the first since we left the Sandy. They need rain badly here. We make light bread Saturday mornings to bake at night and make more at night to bake Sunday morning so you see we necessarily have to do some of our Saturday's work on Sunday.

Mr. Parker thinks it ever so nice that we have no mopping to do; that is something nearly every husband dislikes I think. Now we drive into Jutiralta. It is quite a little town - no timber; wells from 100 to 125 feet deep. Flour \$3.00 per hundred weight, potatoes 25 cents a bushel and they are splendid ones.

Now the children are playing Blind Man's Buff and are jumping rope as they cannot play at hide and seek as there is not a place in all the land to hide.

We are waiting for those who did not have their wagon

tires spiked to have them set as they are very loose.

Mr. More's Babe fell into the fire and burned its hand but not seriously.

We find the citizens very accommodating.

We have now gone into camp on account of the lame mule. It has been very windy this afternoon. Looks like rain; they need it greatly too.

We saw the first bed of cactus on the Sandy at Belvedier, have seen very little since.

We are almost natives in color already.

7 - We start from Kenasaw without our breakfast.

8 - We had to stay in our wagons last night; the wind blew so hard that we lashed our wagons together. We set our oil stove in a box in the wagon and cook, no matter how hard the wind blows. It is cold this morning. There are many flowers over the prairie through this section and one kind looks like larkspur, others like prairie pinks; they are of several colors. We see lots of Red Root as we near the Platte River. The grass seems to be backward; grazing is very poor.

We are watering the stock in Lavell. The weather is getting colder.

The bluffs on the Platte are not so large as those on the Nemaha.

The water at Lavell is very good. After dinner we are in sight of old Fort Kearney. There are several farms along here but scarcely a shade tree set out around the



buildings. Most of the buildings are of sod and their pig pens and corrals are of the same. As we drive along we think of B. Raper, C. Tucker and many others who camped here twelve or thirteen years ago. No doubt the country has changed greatly since then.

People burn corn and willow brush for fuel. We saw two antelopes while in camp for dinner.

The small grain looks pretty well since we passed Lavell.

On the Platte bottoms it is very dry and windy. There are three frame buildings and several adobe houses. They are building an adobe house just east of the trees that stand where the Fort was. We drove around by where the officers quarters were. I looked for some relics but found nothing but some cottonwood things, old boots, shoes, cans and such like. The grounds are grown up nicely with blue grass.

One man living here gave Orlando an old shot canister we saw some bomb shells also. Camped two miles west of the old Fort in what is called Adobe City, with a bachelor by the name of Clark. We were treated just as kindly as we could wish; had the use of his house.

Had quite a shower of rain.

Baked a supply of bread and cooked beans and potatoes

Just across the Platte looks grand and fearful. The train is just going by to the west with 29 cars in all; four emigrant cars, one passenger and the balance freight cars.



Took dinner four miles west of Kearney Junction.  
Went into camp six miles west of Kearney on account of  
our mule - it could not travel.

- 9 - We stayed over today and did our washing. We find  
our washing machine and large kettle almost indispensable;  
there are so many to wash for.

All the men except Mr. Parker went hunting. They  
brought in a deer, dressed it and cooked it at night.

- 10 - Had a terrible fright this morning, occasioned by  
Mrs. Moore's dress catching fire. I hurried to her help  
before a man named Mathews (he being the only man present)  
could extinguish the flames.

Sold our mule and are on our way. Had a freeze last  
night.

Mabel, our little girl, is five years old today and  
the children in camp gave her some nice little presents  
and had a nice party.

Mr. Lasley went back to Kearney and got the Pawnee  
Republican. There was joy in camp as it was the first  
word we received from Pawnee - Thanks, Mr. Editor. We  
find cactus here - bird nest and flat leaf.

We dug a well when we stopped here. It was four feet  
deep and had plenty of good water in it. The deep wells  
are left behind for the present.

The Platte valley is large and beautiful. This is a  
lovely day.

- May 11 - Stayed in Overton, Dawson County, last night. Plenty of

fish and tramps. We begin to see herds of cattle again. It is very cold this morning. When we look off to the bluffs, the houses and covered wagons look like they are two or three stories high.

Mr. Moore's team ran away today - ran into another wagon.

We are rising at the rate of 7 feet to the mile.

May 12 - Camped on the bank of the Platte. We lay over here a day. Snow fell and it is very cold.

Must see if my dinner is cooked; my bread is baked. Baked it in the wagon on the oil stove. We fitted up our spring wagon for a sitting room with the little oil stove for a heater. It did not work well.

It commenced to rain hard; at 2 o'clock continued cold with a little snow and hail.

More company overhauled us here; there is one woman and two children with them.

May 13 - Started out this morning in a cold mist which is hard on man and beast.

One of our horses (Old Maggie) got scared at the cars (train) and nearly upset the wagon. The station here is Willow Island.

We have not seen an Indian yet.

We see the smoke of a coming train as we drive out at 7 o'clock and it passes us at 10 o'clock. They travel 12 miles an hour along here, that is, the freight train.

We see prairie dog towns all along the Platte; there

is a cedar tree on an island in the river - Islands are numerous.

We have the company of three other wagons. Today noon, Frank got dinner - fried potatoes and meat and made coffee.

We camped right on the bank of the Platte for dinner. The bottom is very narrow.

On the north side where we travel the road runs within about 10 rods of the water's edge. For about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile today we ran into deep water and had to back out and cross the R.R. track and had a hard time as it was so steep. Still getting colder. The frost last Thursday night injured the wheat badly.

May 14 - Camped away out on the Platte bottom last night. I got breakfast at sun up. Mr. Parker had breakfast and is waiting. My eyes are very sore. The family is well and enjoying the trip; we traveled 27 miles yesterday. We camped in McPherson County, just opposite the town of Brady Island. There is considerable timber along here now and we begin to see large herds again.

Some of our crowd have whooping cough but not bad yet.

Took dinner in sight of North Platte. We now pass a herd of Texas cattle and horses which reach from the river up to the hills.

The ground is white with alkali. There are five tents and six wagons with the herd.

It is a warm afternoon.



We see scarcely a garden or a bit of cultivated land about this section of the Platte. We cross the river on the R.R. bridge; there are two span. We are now in North Platte City getting horses shod; got a nice lot of mail. Letters from the Moss girls; were truly glad to hear from them. Saw the first irrigating ditch as we drove into this place.

This is a beautiful location.

Met Prof. Babbitt on the street and bade him goodbye. Started out to overtake our party which had gone on while we were getting horses shod. We soon overtook them in camp, and just as we drove up Orlando saw a jack rabbit and made it known, and all the dogs, men and boys started the chase. The dogs soon found it; the ground being level and we had a fine view of the chase as it went right through camp and one greyhound caught it just as it passed us.

15 - It rained all night and is still raining this morning. Is cold and at 10 o'clock still raining. However, we are traveling.

There is plenty of creek water between the Plattes, for stock and it is beautiful and clear.

Now we are nearing O'Fallens bluffs where the North and South Plattes leave the bottom. We camp at O'Fallens bluffs tonight.

16 - Still cloudy and cold. Went up on the bluffs where we could see both the North and the South Platte. The

North Platte looks to be about 4 miles off but we cannot tell much about distance in this part of Nebraska.

The South Platte is about one mile away. We passed only two houses yesterday in a distance of 18 miles. Here we see the first sagebrush.

Stopped, cooked dinner, made light bread to bake tonight. Called on my train neighbors while Mr. Parker and the boys hitched up three teams. Then started to Alkali, the next station about two miles on. It is a little warmer - sure shines this afternoon. The hounds tried to catch another jack rabbit but did not succeed.

Since we follow the South Platte we have crossed several streams of the nicest gravel imaginable. The water sinks into the stream beds as far as we have traveled today.

Today we see stones for the first time in days. They are on top of the sand hills and look as though they were melted and poured on the sand while hot.

Mrs. Moore, Harlie and I ran up to the top of the bluff. There is a space of a fourth of a mile where the bluff extends to the water's edge. I gathered three kinds of moss.

Air growing cooler as night approaches wind high. We drive in the canon to camp in a comfortable place. Several of us took a stroll over the bluffs but ahead of us seemed higher so we came back, tired, got supper and made beds.

17 - It hailed, rained and blew hard and is very cold. Did not get up early this morning. Will not drive far but will stop and bake bread and cook a supply of other victuals.

We have not seen for a week, any of the dry weather they have out this way. I suppose Pawnee County is not suffering from drouth as the wind comes from the East and one would suppose this shower would extend as far as that. O! What a drove of cattle coming down the river!

In sight of Ogalalla. Here was where the train was robbed last winter. I must stop writing and mix my bread so it will be ready to bake when we stop at Ogalalla.

They have a graveyard on the bluff, one mile from town and it looks high and dry.

A train is at the station with 26 cars. The stations are from nine to eighteen miles apart through here.

There is but one little garden that a traveler can see in three or four days' travel. There are seventeen or eighteen houses in this town. They are all frame houses. The out buildings are adobe. This is Keith County. The soil looks, at this place, as though it would produce well if cultivated, but there is not a bit of ground in cultivation nor a tree to be seen: not a shade tree growing in sight - when one's eyes get weary, one must look at the bluffs or telegraph poles to rest them. The poles are numerous as they are on both sides of the track and fine wires since we left Kearney.



18 - Camped at Brule Station last night - very cold this morning. Sun shines very faintly. Just sent the hounds after another rabbit. The road is very wet. Now very sandy as we strike the sand hills. At 2 o'clock we went into camp to air our things, a little between showers and cook a supply of victuals. It was very cold last night.

We camped in a sand stream right under the bluff in a very comfortable place.

19 - We were aroused this morning before train time by a Nebraska breeze that lifted the sand freely around our victuals.

The trains do not stop for any day in the week so far as we have followed the track. This morning's train, when it went up, had eleven emigrant cars, well filled. They cheer us when they pass us in the day time.

We are "lying over" at Big Spring. I think it is in Cheyenne County, though it may be in Keith County yet. The sun shines this morning making Sunday cheerful.

The little ones are having Sunday School in our tent.

It has been, by far, the windiest day we have had. We have not had more than four hours since we started, that we could raise the wagon covers. I was on the sick list today on account of my eyes; they are very sore; could not see to write and did not get to ramble as we are in the sand storm.

May : 20 - Monday we start out. It is cold but clear. Horses and mules look well. Children cough. Storm no better

here. The bluffs extend to the river. My eyes are no better but we all feel rested. Will have hilly roads for some distance, we hear.

Oh! dear, what a dreadful affair occurred just after starting. Mr. Moore's mules started to run and because his wife did not have hold of the lines, he beat her! What an outrage!

Just here is the Big Spring where the express was robbed. We watered here and start. Can look over the Platte and see many antelope.

Here the bluffs extend to the river making in all four places where they do so this side of Ft. Kearney.

Now as we near Julesburg we are traveling in Colorado and it does not differ in appearance from Nebraska. I can see we will travel in Colorado in all ten or twelve miles, then in Nebraska again.

Very much disappointed in not finding more of a town here. Not a garden, do not even see a chicken and not a hill of potatoes that can be seen with the naked eye.

Nothing but section houses for miles and miles. No house between sections where we traveled the last week. They have splendid water in Julesburg to drink but none for stock; we got some a mile from town at the R.R. track. The wells are all curbed with wood as there is no stone here to amount to anything.

Now here at Julesburg we leave the Platte. I took my farewell book just as I write this. Two miles more

and we are in Nebraska again. We leave the sand hills here.

We have not had to double teams thus far. The sand is worse here than at North Platte or any other portion we have traveled over. Good level roads again.

21 - Camped on a stream called Lodge Pole. A fine stream that affords more water than North Nemaha, but not a stick of timber, not even a willow. Plenty of fish in the stream. We are now at Lodge Pole station; it has two houses and a depot and post office.

Rainy again today and cold. - very disagreeable. I stopped at the section house while the folks ate dinner and warmed the little ones.

As we travel along the Lodge Pole we discover that there has been a hard rain for the road is very muddy.

Cotton Station. This is the finest location we have found for days. Lodge Pole stream comes to the road again. We will come to a little lake in two miles straight ahead, but will keep to the left and avoid it as the water will run into our wagon boxes. We meet a team here which is rather unusual. We see a stone culvert in the R.R.

There! There run two antelopes. Pop snapped at them and off they went.

This is a beautiful river bottom that forms a dam between the Plattes; no sagebrush, but cactus. The soil looks as though it might produce something, such as fruit, but it is quite gravelly in many places.



We are camped on the bank of the Lodge Pole and just now forded it; the water ran into the boxes of the lumber wagons. There is thunder and it looks as though we would have a hard shower soon. Very cold.

May 22 - Started on the road this morning. Still cold. We all baked bread last night and bathed the little ones. This morning rained, and last night blew as hard as I ever knew it in Pawnee. All know that was pretty hard as the rain blew through our covers and dampened us.

We are now at Sidney. The soldiers were in a fine location. It is a healthful place. Here we see shade trees. Everything looks lively. There are so many freight wagons. I suppose to supply the Blackhills.

This is a fine river bottom but not a bit of it in cultivation.

Thirty miles right north of Sidney, on Pumpkin Creek, there is plenty of timber so old settlers told Mr. Parker today and no one is living there although it is a good place for homesteading.

Warm and clear this afternoon. I am still on the sick list. The rest are well except whooping cough which is no better. In our party we have two (2) sheet iron stoves and an oil and one coal stove, two tents.

With as many cattle as there are on the grass here we have to pay 10¢ per quart for milk and that skimmed. At Sidney butter was 25¢, flour \$3.00. We bought radishes at a cent a piece; they were raised at Council

Bluffs, Iowa. They are rather small.

We see Wagram in the distance. There is plenty of building stone, the first we have seen in a long time. Here is where a party went fishing on a hand car. They sent one of their party for drinking water, while he was gone to the river for the water, the Indians came so close that the party ran away and left him and the reds scalped the poor fellow.

Due to the illness of the writer, there was no account kept from here until June 12.

#### Wyoming

June 12 - Camped on Harris Fork of Green River. Traveled until dark, did not strike either wood or water; turned out of the road by a mound to camp. Ate what we had cooked, fed the horses and went to bed. Got up at daybreak, started as soon as they could harness, found water in 2 miles. Camped for breakfast. It is a fine stream; can be forded. It was named by Kit Carson, Black's Fork of Green River, where there are a great many Ute Indians. I hate the looks of them.

Stopped till after dinner as they haven't caught us with the sick child yet. It is raining now. The station here is Bryan. The supposition is that the Indians in Idaho will make us trouble as they have already made trouble for others.

The teams, all but four have gone on to find grazing. Men at the station say it is 60 miles to good grass. The

folks with the sick child cannot come until day after tomorrow. We will wait till morning then go on. We are having a hail storm. The ground is white but the hail stones are small.

- 13 - We leave our sick folks to come on tomorrow. They are better. It is cool this morning.

Dinner over. We start out. Haven't come to our company yet. This is the windiest day we have had since we started. We have had very good weather so far as wind was concerned.

See the snow on long range of mountains. Here at 3 o'clock we cross Ham Fork. It is rising and is very high now; just touched the wagon box. We must follow up Blacks Fork. It is a large river.

- 14 - Started at half past 6. Froze last night. The roads are much better than we expected to find. They are like Nebraska roads. Of course we have hills to cross but only one so far; worse than we have traveled over before. It is so much better so far than we anticipated. We have never stalled our teams. Some told us we would suffer with heat crossing the plains but we find it uncomfortably cool.

I would advise one coming this way to have flannel and waterproof clothing. All who have that kind have unpacked them and are still uncomfortably cool such days as this.

Crossed another "Muddy" River this morning. Grass is



thin and short yet; has been ever since we made the other crossing of the "Muddy," that is, where we struck the thick alkali. They told us that when we had traveled a distance of 200 miles, which would take us to Green River, that we would be out of the alkali.

We crossed Green River, Tuesday - this is Friday - we still see Alkali stream. Crossed a strong white stream of it just before we camped last night. The soil is of such a light color that it is very hard on the eyes in the sunshine. Now at 8 o'clock we pass a nice spring of good water.

See sage hens and thick grass; the ground is covered with large bushes of sage with some timber on the hills and mountains.

This afternoon is the first time we have seen game. Mr. Lesh brought in a horned toad and a sage hen.

Here the soil changes to a yellow clay.

15 - Camped last night on the railroad once more; only two trains passed while we were in camp. Froze hard and is cold this morning with wind right from the snow. We are on a level with it and can look right across. Sun is shining brightly.

We start out at 5 o'clock in advance of the wagon train. We pass a mineral spring which is a curiosity.

Now we have reached the top of the mountain. It is an exceedingly high one too. No one knows how high as there is no barometer in the crowd.