14. Pioneer Travel

Well, let us return to the story of our ancestors, my Little Dear One.

Our long ancestral history is rich and complicated. I am sure all our ancestors have fascinating histories on so many sides, but the truth is we just do not have many records about what their day-to-day lives were really like. Some of the histories that are about our ancestors have been researched by relatives like Fred Althoff and Jack Henkel on the Schulte-Althoff side, Fran Hoefer on the Hoefer side, and of course Sylveria Ruden on the Sabers side. But the very large scope of just those three family stories shows the seeming impossibility of ever trying to bring them to life in some kind of inclusive Family Story. In addition, our ancestors, both by blood and by marriage, include so many different families, some pioneer and some not, that if we choose to learn about all of them, we could spend years and years just making their Stories. There is the Lammers family, the Roling family, the Schwabe family, the Lampe family, the Reisberg, von Lehmden, Ploessl, Hermsen, Raue, Domeyer, Tuschen, Osterhaus, Ruden, Puetz, Lies, Krapfl, Noethe, Forster, Klostermann, Ketelsleger, Meek, Rechtien, Rohe, Eickelman, Grutholter, Busing, Korvahe, Brechting, Schauerte, Ruschen, Kamp, Dircks, Moller, Mebben, Wessels, Korfflagen, Hermes, Bogeman, Kemper, Degenhardt, Schulten, Von Hausen, Christians, Hermes, Sivers, Daniels, and Plett families, for a start! So let us stay focused on the Story of Heinrich and Maria, my grandparents and your great-great grandparents.

The Lammers brothers left Cincinnati about 1849-1850, perhaps partly because of the cholera epidemic, and went to New Vienna, Iowa, where they bought farms. Once they were well established there, they probably encouraged Heinrich and Maria to move west. Cincinnati was becoming more crowded with immigrants, which meant that land values were going up, but also increased the potential for the diseases of crowded conditions. Heinrich and Maria may have chosen to stay in Cincinnati at first because in 1849 they had a one-year-old child, Mary, and Maria was pregnant again with Sophia. But by the time my father, Henry, was born in November 1853, they were ready to go. According to Sylveria Ruden, Heinrich and Maria "knew some of the Lammers who had moved to Iowa, so Heinrich made a covered wagon and started their trip to New Vienna, Iowa. They had to stop often to let the oxen graze and drink on prairie land." Since this is all the written information we have about their trip, we will look at the trips of other pioneers. Heinrich and Maria's experiences were probably similar. He and Maria would have bought two sturdy oxen to pull their covered wagon, and they would have arranged with at least one other

couple to make the trip with them for safety. Then they would have packed the wagon carefully with only what they would need for the journey. They had heard many stories of wagons being overloaded. Some pioneers travelled with a milk cow tied to the back of the wagon for milk. Heinrich and Maria may have done that even though the cow would have slowed them down a little, because they had three small children, including a three-month-old infant, my father, but I don't think they did this, because I think they used resources along the way.

The paintings and photos we see of pioneer travel often show mules or horses pulling the covered wagons, but the reality is that one-half to three-quarters of covered wagons were pulled by oxen. Horses are good for short distance travel but cannot last for an extended trip. Mules are strong and can go faster than oxen but are often tricky and ornery to handle. Oxen are reliable, tougher than mules, and will eat poor grass. Here is a good explanation by Stephanie Flora in *oregonpioneers.com*. There were pros and cons to all the choices.

Horses were thought to be faster but required additional grain to keep them fit for the arduous journey. That meant that valuable space in the wagon had to be used to store their provisions. The stamina of the horse was not equal to the mule or the oxen and they were more likely to stray or be stolen by marauding Indians. Many an emigrant mourned the loss of their horses or had to lay over while they went in search of them.

Mules tended to have more stamina than the horses. Mules could travel about 20 miles a day. They also were more surefooted in treacherous climbs due to the fact that, unlike a horse, they are able to see where they are placing their hind feet. Although known as "easy keepers" they still required a certain amount of grain to keep them fit when working under severe conditions. Randolph B. Marcy, Captain, US Army stated in his guidebook, Prairie Traveler:

"Upon good firm roads, in a populated country, where grain can be procured, I should unquestionably give the preference to mules, as they travel faster, and endure the heat of summer much better than oxen; and if the journey be not over 1000 miles, and the grass abundant, even without grain, I think mules would be preferable. But when the march is to extend 1500 or 2000 miles, or over a rough sandy or muddy road, I believe young oxen will endure better than mules."

A mule's reputation as being stubborn comes from the fact that a mule will stop and look over a questionable situation before proceeding. A mule will refuse to proceed if it determines that it is dangerous. It took a special type of person to deal with the mules and many a teamster rued the day he became involved with them. Also, the cost of a team of six mules was around $600 making the oxen a much more economical choice.

Oxen became the choice of a majority of the emigrants. Almost without exception, the guidebooks recommended oxen. They were a little slower, traveling only 15 miles per day on average. However, oxen were dependable, less likely to run off, less likely to be stolen by the Indians, better able to withstand the fatigue of the journey and were more likely to survive on available vegetation. If they strayed, they could be pursued and overtaken by horsemen. Not only were they the least expensive to purchase but they were more valuable on arrival, especially to farmers. In 1846 a yoke of oxen cost around $25. During the gold rush years prices peaked at around $40-$60 in the late spring.

And one final issue that entered into the decision was the difference in time to harness oxen as compared to a horse or mule. Suze Hammond, while reading "March of the Mounted Riflemen to Oregon in 1849" by Major Osbourne Cross noticed reference to this point and brought it to my attention. As one who has had to harness horse teams, Suze made this observation -

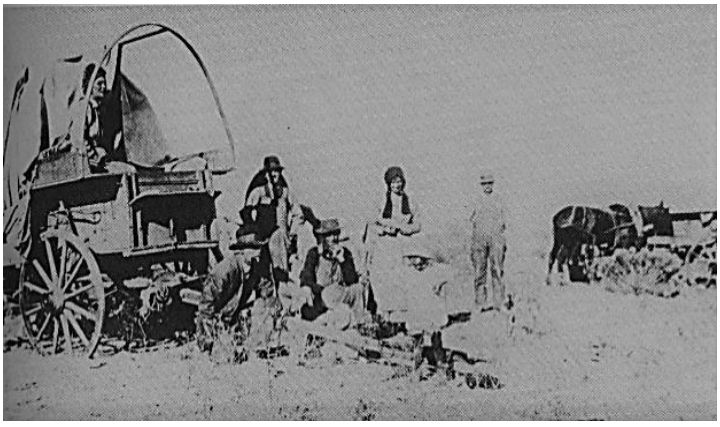
"An ox requires the hoop under the yoke be slid up, the yoke attached to the wagon tongue and a lead string put through its nose ring, and that's about it! (The second ox is a little harder to hook up because you have to get the first one to stand still too, as they are to be solidly attached to one another.) The equine has a cinch under its belly, a bridle with a bit, traces to attach to the singletrees, lines to arrange so they will not tangle, a cross-lines arrangement so that the teamster ends up with only one set of lines and not one for each animal, a horse collar closed, and all straps lying flat so as not to abrade its skin over the day's pull. The amount of time difference would be significant when preparing to leave each morning."

Care of the Animals

Whatever animal was chosen, the success of the journey depended on the care that the animals received. The greatest error of the inexperienced traveler was to overwork the animals at the beginning of the journey. To avoid problems it was best to start out with short and easy drives until the teams were broken in and became used to the routine of the day.

Grass and water were normally abundant in the eastern portions of the route. To the west were long stretches where grass and water were scarce, and it required animals in good condition to endure the fatigues and hard labor associated with the passage of these deserts. Drivers were encouraged to not abuse their animals or force them out of a walk. The teamster who made the least use of the whip usually kept their animals in the best condition.

In traveling with ox teams in the summer, the best mileage could be made by starting at dawn and making a "nooning" near grass and water during the heat of the day, as oxen suffer greatly from the heat of the sun in midsummer. When it cooled, they could be hitched to the wagons again and the journey continued in the afternoon. Sixteen or eighteen miles a day could be made this way without injury to the animals.



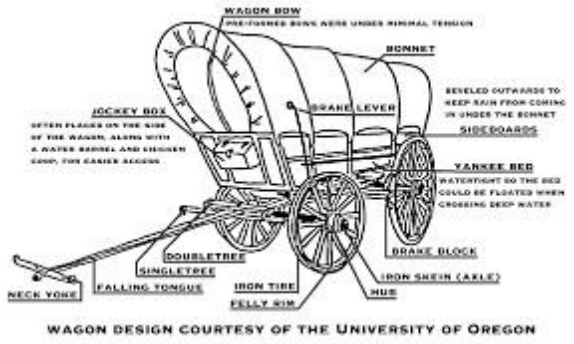
So we are quite sure Heinrich and Maria used oxen for their journey. If they took a horse, as we see in this photo, it would have been used more for riding than for pulling the wagon. Horses and mules did not have the brute strength to pull a covered wagon out of a mud hole, nor the endurance and resilience to keep going under harsh conditions and climates on trips where food and water might not always be available. In addition, in the 1840s, an ox cost $25, a mule $75, and a horse could cost even more.

Pioneers traveling in pairs or small groups, as we think Heinrich and Maria did, would not try to take too many animals because the trip was too difficult to manage a lot of animals. Heinrich and Maria would have counted on Maria's brothers helping them find livestock to buy once they were on their own farm. Pioneers lived in their wagons for the duration of the trip, sometimes staying in taverns and lodgings along the way. At the end of a day's journey, the oxen were set free to graze and drink from a nearby stream or river; the men and women and older children carried water, built up fires and prepared the meals. Everyone would learn new skills on the trail, and these trail experiences often changed women's views about what it meant to be a woman, preparing them for the hardships of pioneer life in their new homes Heinrich and Maria would probably not have had to make too many adjustments because they were used to hard work from their pioneer experience in Cincinnati. Also, we think they brought money from Germany to help them get started in Cincinnati, and that they sold their Cincinnati property for a good price to help them get started quickly in New Vienna. We will look more closely, later on, at what Heinrich and Maria's journey might have been like. Now, what was their wagon like?

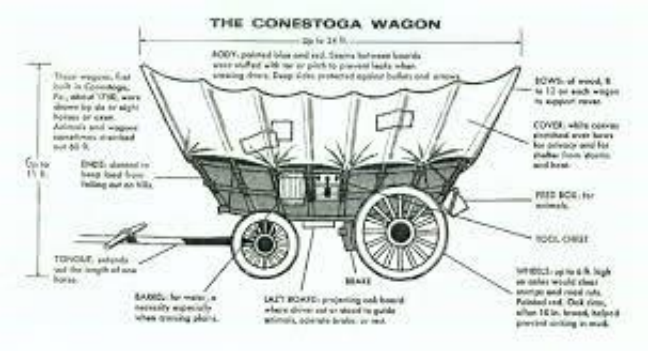
I used to enjoy listening to some of the stories my Grandma told about how they traveled from Ohio to New Vienna. Here are some pictures that remind me of her stories. She talked about how Grandpa bought good maple wood to build his wagon, and a strong piece of hickory wood for the tongue that connected to the oxen yoke. That piece had to be especially strong, she said. Grandpa made a basic farm wagon bed like this one. He hung the box body on platform springs to help make the ride a little smoother. Although the romance of the great "ships of the prairie", the Schooners and especially the Conestogas, captured the public imagination, the reality is that there was a lot of pioneer travel done in simple covered farm wagons.

There were three kinds of covered wagons. The Conestoga was the first, built about 1750 in Pennsylvania to carry heavy loads of freight along the east coast and Canada, pulled by six to eight oxen. The Prairie Schooners, like this one, were the wagons for pioneer travel, typically a little smaller than the Conestoga but larger and more elaborate and with more arches than the third covered wagon, the farm wagon. But all three types of covered wagons were constructed in basically the same way. The Yankee bed, the basic bed of the wagon, and the sideboards above

the bed were made of maple, hickory or oak. This part of the covered wagon consisted of long planks for the bottom and sideboards slightly longer than the bottom boards, which were bolted to the long side of the bottom boards. The seams were filled with pitch or tar to make them waterproof. Bows, or arches, the u-shaped wooden slats that supported the bonnet, were usually made from hickory, white oak or ash. The wagon worker cut five to eight strips of wood, depending on the type of covered wagon, that measured 2-1/4 inch wide by 3/8 inch thick by 12 feet long and then soaked them in water for 24 hours. The slats were placed under a wagon wheel and the ends were slowly brought upward until they were about 30 inches apart. Then they were tied securely and allowed to dry for a couple of days before being used in the wagon. Oma said this was the most critical and tedious part of building the covered wagon, because it had to be done slowly over several days, increasing the curve gradually. Here are diagrams of a Prairie Schooner and a Conestoga.



WAGON DESIGN COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



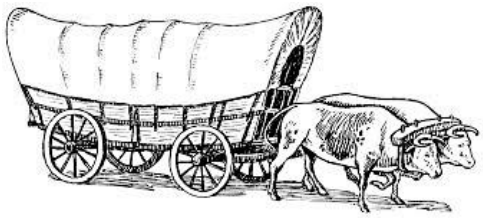
When the bed and arches were built and checked, and checked again, the bonnet or covering of the wagon was securely fastened to the arches and the bed. It was made of 10-oz. canvas, which is a heavy cotton duck material. The canvas was covered with linseed oil to make it waterproof. Cotton draw strings sewn into the hems of the canvas at the front and back openings of the bonnet allowed the bonnet to be closed at night for protection and during the day for protection from sun or rain.

Let's look at some pictures showing how it must have felt traveling by covered wagon: hot dusty lonely lands, trying to follow ruts in the land made by previous pioneer travelers so as not to get lost, traveling through woods or high grasses and shrubs where you had to lead your animals to try to find your way.

Streams and rivers were critical to survival because they provided drinking water, but traveling across them was especially treacherous and difficult.

Getting across the Mississippi River proved the greatest challenge of all. Before we talk about that, let's spend some time learning about covered wagon travel, which has always fascinated me. Listening to my grandmother's stories, I used to imagine how exciting it would be to travel across the country in a covered wagon. But in real life, that kind of travel might be anything but pleasant. Reports about the covered wagon experiences of American pioneers vary significantly. Different trip experiences, faulty memories, inexpert reporters, divergent interests, ulterior motives and reporter bias are factors that need to be considered when reading the reports. The trips themselves often differed greatly in such basic things as the type of conveyance used, the amount of belongings taken, the trails chosen, and the time of year the journey was begun, all of which were often dictated by the distance of the travel.

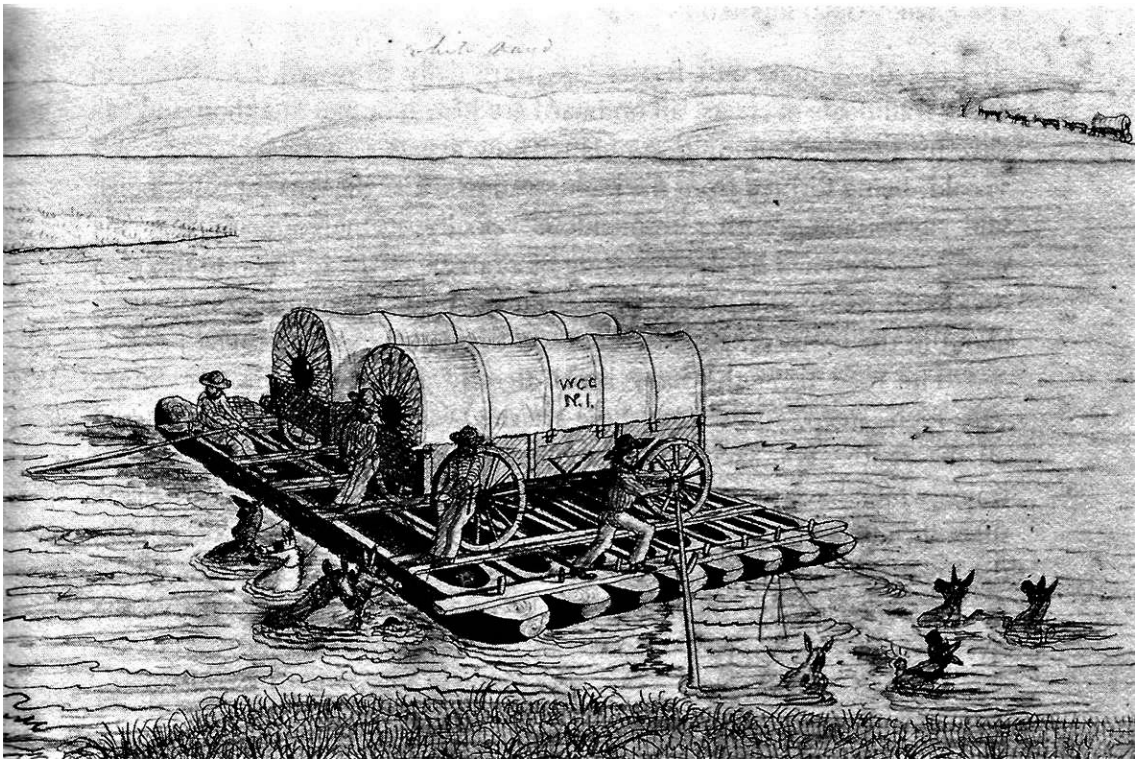
Some of the hardest trips and those most often talked about or thought of, were the ones taken by pioneers who chose to go to California or the west coast of America. Those journeys were often made in wagon trains, with many more people, belongings and livestock than Heinrich and Maria would have traveled with, and they



often were taken in a Prairie Schooner or Conestoga wagon, like this one, typically with six oxen to pull the heavy wagon.

Early pioneers often made signs like this one and staked them at river crossings to help later travelers decide the best way to get across. Drownings in swollen, fast-moving rivers were one of the most serious hazards of the trip. Animals could panic and bolt, tipping their wagons into the swift current. Overloaded and top-heavy wagons were not uncommon.

Above: Crossing the Platte River. Drownings here were common. Oregontrail101.com



Ferry crossings were much safer--and more expensive--than trying to swim the livestock. The etching here shows California-bound J. Goldsborough Bruff's 1849 drawing of an eight-dugout ferry at the Deer Creek crossing of the North Platte. The mules are tied to the boat. {Courtesy Randy Brown}.

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints has some excellent records of the river crossings of the pioneer travels of their church members, as recorded in *Wyominghistory.org*.

Many made small boats by emptying their wagons, removing the wagon box from the running gear, caulking the boxes watertight with tar, dismantling the running gear into pieces, and then ferrying everything across the water in the wagon boxes, using poles or oars for guidance and often using ox or human power to tow the craft across the water with long ropes. This was a fairly reliable method, but, due to the unloading, dismantling and reloading, very slow.

Big cottonwood trees were plentiful; some of the earliest travelers made simple rafts of cottonwood logs lashed together, which they poled or rowed across. These were unwieldy and dangerous. Soon, emigrants figured out how to hollow out cottonwood logs and make dugout canoes, 20 feet long or more. By lashing three canoes together or lashing a canoe on either side of a log in the middle, emigrants found they could make a stable boat of the right width so that a wagon's wheels could rest inside the two outermost canoes.

The Mormon ferry

In mid-June 1847, the first Mormon pioneer party, bound for the Salt Lake Valley, experimented with wagon-box boats and rafts before building a stout ferry out of cottonwood dugouts and a pine-pole deck. Even Church President Brigham Young "stript himself and went to work with all his strength," wrote diarist Thomas Bullock.

As they were finishing up, they found 108 wagons from other parties, stretched over four miles and "all wanting to cross the river," Mormon diarist Norton Jacob wrote.

A practical solution suggested itself. Ten Mormon men stayed behind to run the ferry for the rest of the emigration season. They were directed to charge non-Mormons $3 cash or $1.50 worth of flour or other provisions at Iowa or Missouri prices to cross a wagon and family. The men were "to keep a Just & accurate account, & make the returns of the proceeds of their labor to the Authorities of the Church & also to cross the Brethren"—that is, the Mormon emigrants expected to arrive later in the summer—" & charge such as are able to pay a reasonable price to be determined by the council that shall come with the Camp," Jacob noted.

This Mormon Ferry, as it came to be known, was the first commercial ferry at the upper crossing of the Platte, operating about where the bridge on Wyoming Boulevard crosses now between Casper and its suburb of Mills, Wyo.

Hickman's ferry

The following year, 1850, saw another huge jump in traffic to around 50,000 emigrants, and also a big improvement in the ferry. A Missourian, David Hickman, appeared on the scene in May with a better idea. He and a few men anchored stout posts in each riverbank, strung a strong rope between them and attached to it with pulleys a pair of shorter ropes, one linked to the bow and one to the stern of the ferryboat. By making the bow rope shorter, the boat crossed the stream at an angle to the current, and the current drove it across, "much better than steam on as rapid a stream as this foaming Platte," wrote diarist Madison Moorman.

Hickman and his men built three of these boats and seem to have had them running all through June. The Mormons at this time were still running a single boat, but with a rope-and-pulley system similar to Hickman's. At least one diarist mentions a fifth boat jointly owned by Hickman and the Mormons.

With three boats and a crossing time of only a few minutes, Hickman and his partners could now handle around 300 wagons per day. Emigrants now waited a day or less for their turn.

The price, however, had risen to $5 per wagon. The Missourians "are doing a 'smashing' business," wrote diarist A.C. Morse. "The proprietor told me last night that he could make $20,000 as his own interest"—nearly $600,000 in today's money— "and return to the States in October." No need to

prospect for gold in California, diarist after diarist noted, when it was possible to make that kind of money right here on the Platte.

Not everyone used the ferries, however. At likely spots all along the 25 miles between the mouth of Deer Creek and the upper ferries, people made boats of their own, sold them to a party following them, who in turn would sell them for the same price to the next party behind them. All seem to have felt they were getting a fair deal.

The great majority of emigrants continued swimming their livestock across the river—and the practice remained dangerous. “Two men were drowned yesterday & it is said 19 have been drowned in the last 11 days,” Francis Hardy noted from the upper ferry June 10, 1850.

Wagon companies would often search a day or even two for the bodies but felt compelled after that to resume their trek. Emigrants traveling to California with Finley McDiarmid saw the body of a drowned man caught in the branches of a dead tree in the river. “One of the men swam out and towed him in,” McDiarmid wrote. “There was nothing about his person that could give any information where he was from or who he was. They buried him the usual way of burying people upon this road by digging a *shallow small hole* [italics in original] and rolling him in.”

The bridges

Reports of cholera led to a drastic reduction in trail traffic in 1851, and prices fell accordingly, to $2.50 and $3.00 per wagon at the upper Platte ferries. In 1852, the number of westbound travelers who came over the trail in what’s now Wyoming boomed again, peaking at 70,000 that year. In May, some emigrants built a bridge over the North Platte at the mouth of Deer Creek. High water washed it away after a few weeks, however.

Let’s take a short look at a sobering article from "*Crossing the Plains, 1865*," in eyewitnesstohistory.com.

Crossing the Plains, 1865

It took approximately 300 years from 1500 to 1800 for European population to extend from the East Coast of America to the Mississippi River. Popular wisdom at the beginning of the 19th century hypothesized it would take at least another 300 years, or most likely longer, to fill the area between the Mississippi and the Pacific coast.

Of course, it didn't take 300 years to settle the West. A number of factors accelerated the pace of change. Beginning with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the US government acquired domain over the land to the west of the Mississippi through war, treaty or purchase. The discovery of gold in California and the

promise of fertile land lured an estimated 300,000 to the Pacific Coast prior to 1860. In the midst of the Civil War, Congress enacted the Homestead Act entitling any head of family, anyone over the age of 21, or any veteran of military service to 160 acres of land. With the end of the war, many took advantage of the offer filling the westward trails with wagon trains loaded with all their worldly possessions. Before the end of the century America's frontier had been extended to the Pacific and then officially declared closed.

The decision to make the trek could not have been an easy one - motivated no doubt by hard times at home and the promise of better times to the west. Sarah Raymond was one of those who made the journey along with her father, mother and brothers. Her diary doesn't reveal her age, but we can assume she was young, probably a teenager. The family began their journey on May 1, 1865, in Missouri and arrived at their destination in Virginia City, Montana Territory on September 6. Sarah details each day's adventures - accidents, sickness, river crossings, Indian encounters, mud, dust, monotony, and terror. We don't know much about Sarah beyond what appears in her journal except that she married and stayed in Virginia City the rest of her life. She first published her journal at the request of friends in a local newspaper, the "Rocky Mountain Husbandman," in the early 1880s. Her diary was published in book form in 1902.

Eleven Graves

On June 12, 1865 - about 6 weeks after leaving Missouri - Sarah's group of wagons arrives at Fort Kearney, Nebraska Territory, a major way station on the road west. There, the pioneers are confronted with evidence of the hazards of their journey: "Monday, June 12 We stood by the graves of eleven men that were killed last August by the Indians. There was a sort of bulletin-board about midway and at the foot of the graves stating the circumstances of the frightful tragedy. They were a party of fourteen, twelve men and two women, wives of two of the men. They were camped on Plum Creek, a short distance from where the graves are. They were all at breakfast except one man who had gone to the creek for water, he hid in the brush, or there would have been none to tell the tale of the massacre.

There had been no depredations committed on this road all Summer, and emigrants had become careless and traveled in small parties. They did not suspect that an Indian was near until they were surrounded, and the slaughter had commenced. All the men were killed and scalped, and the women taken prisoners. They took what they wanted of the provisions burned the wagons and ran off with the horses.

The one man that escaped went with all haste to the nearest station for help. The soldiers pursued the Indians, had a fight with them and rescued the women. One of them had seen her husband killed and scalped and was insane when rescued

and died at the station. The other woman was the wife of the man that escaped. They were from St. Joe, Missouri."

Killed on the Road

"Sunday, July 16 Just after we crossed the bridge, and where there is a sudden turn in the road, as it winds around the mountain, we saw where two men had been killed and two wagons burned last week. The tire became loose on a wheel of the next to the last wagon in a freight train, the men stopped to tighten it, while the rest of the train moved on, not thinking of danger, and was out of sight in a few minutes. An hour later some of the men came back to see what kept them. There they were - dead and scalped - horses gone, and wagons on fire. The Indians had taken all the freight they could use, piled wood under the wagons, and set it on fire. We saw quantities of white beans scattered over the ground, also the irons from the wagons."

The Dust

"Wednesday, July 26 ...I did not awake this morning until everything was ready for a very early start. Mother had kept my breakfast warm by keeping the stove until the last minute. I sat in the wagon and ate my breakfast after the train had started. When through, I climbed out and went to see how Neelie [Sarah's friend] was. I found her feverish and restless; her symptoms unfavorable.

Oh, the dust, the dust; it is terrible. I have never seen it half as bad; it seems to be almost knee-deep in places. We came twenty miles without stopping, and then camped for the night. We are near a fine spring of most excellent water - Barrel Spring it is called. I do not know why; there are no barrels there. When we stopped, the boys' faces were a sight; they were covered with all the dust that could stick on. One could just see the apertures where eyes, nose and mouth were through the dust; their appearance was frightful. How glad we all are to have plenty of clear cold water to wash away the dust."

Murder in Camp

As Sarah rides along with the wagon train she is approached by a friend - Frank - from a portion of the train that had split off to travel on its own. Her friend has news:

"Saturday, August 5 'Frasier was shot and killed day before yesterday evening.'

'Oh Frank; how did it happen?'

'Hosstetter did it, but I think he was not much to blame'

Frasier is the man who spoke to Cash, Neelie and I, as we were watching the wagons ferried across the Missouri River, whose son ran away from his mother, and home, to come to his father, and go with him to Montana. Frasier had teams and wagons for freighting and Hosstetter some capital to invest in freight, to take to Montana. Frasier advised the purchase of flour, and he would freight it to Virginia City for fifteen dollars per cwt. He said flour was worth fifty and sixty dollars per hundred in Virginia City. (So it was in the Spring of 1864, and as high as seventy-five and one hundred dollars per one hundred, which was the cause of a bread riot in Virginia City.)

No doubt Frasier was honest in his advice, and would have invested in flour for himself. He charged more freight than was right, for ten and twelve cents is the prevailing price; but then Hosstetter should have found that out himself.

When he found he had been imposed upon and learned that flour is retailing at Virginia City for $15 per hundred, he was angry, dissatisfied, and perhaps quarrelsome. Frasier was no doubt very aggravating. They had quarreled several times, and the evening of the 3d, Frasier was heard to say to Hosstetter in a threatening tone:

'You may consider yourself lucky if you ever see Montana. You need not expect to get any of this flour. It will take it all to pay the freight.'

It was getting dark, and Fraser stood with one hand on a wheel as he talked. He then got into the wagon and out again, with something in his hand, which Hosstetter thought was a revolver in the gathering darkness. He came back to the wheel where he had been standing when he made the threat, and Hosstetter thought he had come to shoot him, and fired twice, as he thought, to save his own life, Frasier fell, shot through the brain, and died instantly.

Then it was found he had a hatchet in his hand and had come to tighten a tire on the wheel, which he had found loose when he laid his hand on it. Frasier's eldest son of fourteen years is here. There are five children and their mother at home. Hossteter has three children and a wife. Eleven innocent persons to suffer, no one knows how intensely, for that rash act.

Frasier's son knelt beside his father's dead body and placing his hand on his breast, he swore a fearful oath that he would have but one purpose in life until his father's death is avenged. Oh, what a shocking ambition for so young a boy."

Later in her diary, Sarah describes the trial of Hosstetter:

"...The men from these four trains elected judge, jury, prosecuting attorney and lawyer for the defense, and have tried Hosstetter for murder. The jury brought in

a verdict of 'Not guilty.' He shot in self-defense, as Frasier had threatened to kill him."

Sarah's diary entry a day later notes that a squad of soldiers came and took Hosstetter to a fort near Green River (Wyoming) for an official trial. However, she does not reveal the outcome of that trial.

River Crossing

"Thursday, August 24 We came to a toll bridge over the Blackfoot this morning, where the toll was one dollar per team and fifty cents for horseback riders. There had been an excellent ford just below the bridge. The men collecting the toll had spoiled it by digging ditches on both sides near the bank. The water was clear, and they were plainly visible. Hillhouse [Sarah's brother] mounted Dick [Sarah's horse] to see if we could ford it. One of the men screamed out at him: 'You will mire your horse if you try that.'

'I'll risk it.' And he rode in below where the ditches were dug. The pony's feet were not muddy. Hillhouse found we could easily ford the creek below the ditches, which we did without accident.

It does seem a shame that we should have to pay toll for crossing a stream like that, after fording South Platte, North Platte and Green River.

The Missourians refused to pay the exorbitant price, and offered them fifty cents per wagon. They swore they would not take a cent less than one dollar. But the travelers were too many for them, and they drove over and did not pay a cent. The toll men were fearfully angry, and made great threats, but the men dared them to do their worst and laughed at them.

I do hope we will get ahead of these people to-morrow. They are not the kind of people I like to travel with."

Here is more information from eyewitnesstohistory.com.

RIVER CROSSINGS

River crossings were a constant source of distress for the pioneers. Hundreds drowned trying to cross the Kansas, North Platte and Columbia Rivers--among others. In 1850 alone, 37 people drowned trying to cross one particularly difficult river--the Green.

Emigrant John B. Hill:
"The ferryman allowed too many passengers to get in the boat, and the water came within two inches of the gunwale. He ordered every man to stand steady as the boat was liable to swamp. When we were nearly across the edge of the boat dipped; I thought the boat would be swamped instantly and drowned the last one of us."

Those who didn't drown were usually fleeced. The charge ranged up to 16 dollars, almost the price of an oxen. One ferry earned $65,000 in just one summer. The emigrants complained bitterly.

WALKING
Because most emigrants grossly overloaded their wagons, few could ride inside. Instead, most walked--many made the entire 2,000 mile journey on foot.

ACCIDENTS
The emigrant wagons didn't have any safety features. If someone fell under the massive wagon wheels, death was instant. Many lost their lives this way. Most often, the victims were children.

Edward Lenox:
"A little boy fell over the front end of the wagon during our journey. In his case, the great wheels rolled over the child's head----crushing it to pieces."

WEATHER
Great thunderstorms took their toll. A half-dozen emigrants were killed by lightning strikes; many others were injured by hail the size of apples. Pounding rains were especially difficult for the emigrants because there was no shelter on the open plains and the covered wagons eventually leaked.

CHOLERA
Perhaps the biggest problem on the Trail was a mysterious and deadly disease--called cholera for which there was no cure. Often, an emigrant would go from healthy to dead in just a few hours. Sometimes they received a proper burial, but often, the sick would be abandoned, in their beds, on the side of the trail. They would die alone. Making matters worse were animals that regularly dug up the dead and scattered the trail with human bones and body parts.

Emigrant Agnes Stewart:
"We camped at a place where a woman had been buried and the wolves dug her up. Her hair was there with a comb still in it. She had been buried too shallow. It seems a dreadful fate, but what is the difference? One cannot feel after the spirit is flown."

Cholera killed more emigrants than anything else. In a bad year, some wagon trains lost two-thirds of their people.

Emigrant John Clark:
"One woman and two men lay dead on the grass and some more ready to die. Women and children crying, some hunting medicine and none to be found. With heartfelt sorrow, we looked around for some time until I felt unwell myself. Got up and moved forward one mile, so as to be out of hearing of crying and suffering."

Let's look at one more article from *Danger and Hardship on the Oregon Trail*.

"To enjoy such a trip ... a man must be able to endure heat like a Salamander, mud and *water like a muskrat, dust like a toad, and labor like a jackass. He must learn to eat with his unwashed fingers, drink out of the same vessel as his mules, sleep on the ground when it rains, share his blanket with vermin, and have patience with mosquitos. He must cease to think, except* of *where he may find grass and water and a good camping place. It is hardship without glory."* — Anonymous Settler writing in the St. Joseph, Missouri *Gazette*

Though 19th-century settlers, as well as much of written history, looks at the 2,000-mile Oregon Trail as romantic, almost one in ten who embarked on the trail didn't survive. In fact, the Oregon Trail is this nation's longest graveyard. Of the estimated 350,000 who started the journey, the trail claimed as many as 30,000 victims or an average of 10-15 deaths per mile.

The main causes of deaths along the Oregon/California Trail during 1841 to 1869 were disease, accidents, and weather.

Disease and Illness

"We did not meet any sickness nor see any fresh graves until we came in on the road from St Joseph. From that out, there was scarcely a day but we met six and not less than two fresh graves." – Elizabeth Keegan, 18

Death on the Trail

The number one killer on the Oregon Trail, by a wide margin, was disease and serious illnesses, which caused the deaths of nine out of ten pioneers who contracted them. The hardships of weather, limited diet, and exhaustion made travelers very vulnerable to infectious diseases such as cholera, flu, dysentery, measles, mumps, tuberculosis, and typhoid fever which could spread quickly through an entire wagon camp.

Opportunities for sanitation — bathing and laundering — were severely limited, and safe drinking water frequently was not available in sufficient quantities. Human and animal waste, garbage, and animal carcasses were often in close proximity to available water supplies. As a result, cholera, spread by contaminated water, was responsible for the most deaths overall on the Oregon Trail. Cholera could attack a perfectly healthy person after breakfast and he would be in his grave by noon. With no cure or treatment for the disease, the infected emigrant usually died within 24 hours or less. However, many would linger in misery for weeks in the bouncy wagons. In a bad year, some wagon trains lost two-thirds of their people to the deadly disease.

Food poisoning was often a problem with contaminated food, more likely among single men. Scurvy, caused by a lack of vitamin C, was also a problem. Poisoning from drinking water that was too alkaline was also common.

There was a high incidence of childbirth on the trail and tragedy often came with the arrival of a baby. Death during childbirth was common and infant mortality was high. Poor nutrition, lack of medical care and poor sanitation caused many of these deaths.

Accidents

Throughout the trail's existence, numerous accidents were caused by negligence, exhaustion, guns, and animals.

Wagon accidents were the most common, with both children and adults sometimes falling off or under wagons and being crushed under the wheels.

Crossing rivers was one of the most dangerous things that pioneers were required to do. Swollen rivers could tip over a wagon and drown both people and oxen and valuable supplies, goods, and equipment could be lost. Sometimes this was caused by animals panicking when wading through deep, swift water. Hundreds drowned trying to cross the Kansas, North Platte and Columbia Rivers–among others. In 1850 alone, 37 people drowned trying to cross one particularly difficult Green River.

Those who didn't drown were usually fleeced by a ferryman. The charge ranged up to 16 dollars, almost the price of an oxen. One ferry earned $65,000 in just one summer. The emigrants complained bitterly.

"The ferryman allowed too many passengers to get in the boat, and the water came within two inches of the gunwale. He ordered every man to stand steady as the boat was liable to swamp. *When we were nearly across the edge of the boat dipped; I thought the boat would be swamped instantly and drowned the last one of us*." — Emigrant John B. Hill

Over time, this risk would be reduced as bridges and ferries became available. Even then, there were stories of rafts pitching over and improvised bridges collapsing, throwing people to their deaths.

Sometimes, alcohol played a part. On one occasion, on June 2, 1853, an inebriated emigrant, misjudged the rain-swollen Buffalo Creek, drove his wagon in, and was never seen again.

Firearms were the second leading cause of emigrant injury and death. Because of the need to hunt and fear of Indian attacks, wagon trains were filled with more firepower than they would ever need. One Oregon Trail expedition had a 72-wagon train that carried 260 pistols and rifles, nearly a ton of lead, and over a thousand pounds of gunpowder. Most of the travelers had no training or experience with firearms. Consequently, countless people accidentally shot themselves or others.

The first emigrant to die due to an accidental gunshot was ironically named John Shotwell on May 13, 1841. Making matters worse, was that it was self-inflicted. When he reached for the rifle, muzzle first, the firearm went off.

Shootings were common, but what is rarely heard about in trail history is that nearly 200 people were murdered on the Oregon-California Trail in the mid-1800s. Only one man who was murdered on the trail, Ephraim Brown, lies in a grave with a known location. Missouri pioneer Brown who was

a leading figure on a wagon train bound for California, was killed near South Pass in 1857 in what appears to have been a bitter family dispute.
Starvation often threatened emigrants, but more often, it killed the pioneers' draft animals.

Handling domestic animals also caused accidents when travelers were thrown, kicked or dragged by oxen, horses, and mules. Other injuries were caused by stampeding livestock. Occasionally wild animal deaths occurred when someone unwisely wandered off alone. On a few occasions, buffalo overran wagon trains causing havoc and injury.

Other emigrants suffered cuts, broken bones, burns, animal, insect and snake bites. Others died from drowning (especially in the 1850s before there were many ferries) and quicksand.

On some occasions, many emigrants, particularly children, straggled behind for too long, wandered off looking for flowers or berries, or attempted to hunt while traveling. Though many made their way back to their camps, some were thought to have fallen prey to wild animals or Indians and left behind.

During these dangerous times, travelers often left warning messages to those journeying behind them if there was an outbreak of disease, bad water or hostile Indians nearby.

Boredom was often a problem after day after day of walking and eating the same diet. This was especially true during the 427 miles across Nebraska. Many pioneers complained of the unchanging landscape prompting one early pioneer to express the thought that, after having spent 30 days crossing Nebraska with hardly a change of scenery, he hoped the Indians would attack to relieve the boredom. After crossing most of Nebraska, pioneers were thrilled when they arrived at the landmarks of Courthouse Rock, Chimney Rock, and Scotts Bluff.

Weather
"Such sharp and incessant flashes of lightning, such stunning and continuous thunder, I had never known before. The woods were completely obscured by the diagonal sheets of rain that fell with a heavy roar and *rose in* spray *from the ground. The storm ceased as suddenly as it began. The thunder here is not like the tame thunder of the Atlantic coast. Bursting with a terrific crash directly above our heads, it roared over the boundless waste of the prairie, seeming to roll around the whole circle of the firmament with a peculiar and awful reverberation. The lightning flashed all night."* – Francis Parkman, 1846

Weather related dangers included thunderstorms, lethally large hailstones, lightning, tornadoes, grass fires, and high winds. A half-dozen emigrants were killed by lightning strikes; many others were injured by hail the size of apples. In the Rocky Mountains, there would be large snowstorms and severe cold, causing frostbite and death by freezing.

On the prairies, the intense heat caused wood to shrink, and wagon wheels had to be soaked in rivers at night to keep their iron rims from rolling off during the day. The dust on the trail itself could be two or three inches deep and as fine as flour. Emigrant's lips blistered and split in the dry air, and their only remedy was to rub axle grease on them. Numerous pioneers died from exposure.

American Indians were usually among the least of the emigrants' problems, though the overlanders certainly thought otherwise at the time. Most Indians were peaceful and often helped the emigrants in their journey in a variety of ways. Mostly, the Indians traded with the emigrants. Fresher or different foods to vary their diet and moccasins to replace worn out shoes and boots were exchanged for articles of clothing and trade goods brought for just that purpose. Other help was more direct. Before white men set up ferries and bridges to cross treacherous rivers, Indians were making ferries out of canoes to take wagons and people across.
Tales of hostile encounters far overshadowed actual incidents and a few massacres were highly publicized, further reinforcing the pioneers' fears. This was further complicated by trigger-happy emigrants who shot at Indians for target practice and out of unfounded fear.

The hardships and homesickness caused about one in ten emigrants to turn back. They were called "go-backs" or "turnarounds". Some of these made it only as far as the jumping-off points along the Missouri River where they found the costs of making the trip prohibitive or were scared off by stories they heard. Others made their way further down the trail before turning around.

Mary Ellen Todd, who left Arkansas for Oregon in 1852, claimed of the 100 wagons that began the trip, 96 of them turned around after traveling a considerable distance.
In 1850, Oregon Trail pioneer Seth Lewelling met a 300 wagon caravan retreating from St. Joseph, Missouri, one of the jumping-off towns. Whether due to poor planning or loss, the wagon train had insufficient provisions to make the entire distance of the trail.
In 1850, there was a draught along the trail, which coupled with high traffic caused a number of wagons to return.

In 1852, Ezra and Eliza Jane Meeker reported meeting 11 wagons moving slowly east against the flow of traffic. That group had made it as far as Fort Laramie, Wyoming before losing the last of its menfolk. The wagons, driven by women, were returning in hopes of regaining their homes in the east.
These "go-backs" were a major source of information of the wonders, dangers, and disappointments of what lay upon the trail.

These accounts are certainly scary, my Little Dear One, but the journey Heinrich and Maria took was not very similar to these, for a number of reasons:

1. Our ancestors traveled only about 500-550 miles, not 2000 miles.
2. Our ancestors traveled over terrain that was much less inhospitable than the Oregon and California trails. The route from Cincinnati to New Vienna had a milder climate, more certain sources of water, and virtually no threat from Indians.
3. Our ancestors traveled trails in 1854 that had been successfully traveled by many people before them. This meant that in many instances bridges and ferries had been built to make water crossings safer, and settlements and additional supply posts had been established along the way, which gave weary travelers the chance to stock up on supplies, get their horses shod, trade with Indians, and rest and regroup. In addition, sometimes trail scouts and leaders had written guidebooks to help settlers decide routes for best river-fording, good watering holes, or taverns offering hospitality. Unfortunately, not all these guidebooks were accurate. They left some settlers lost and in danger of running out of

provisions. Letters “home” by travelers who had successfully made the journey were often the best sources of information for potential travelers. This would certainly have been the case for Heinrich and Maria. Her brothers already living in New Vienna and in contact with pioneers newly arriving from Ohio would send letters to Heinrich and Maria with the most current trip information. Because Heinrich was a methodical and practical man, he would have sought out all the most current information available before taking his young family on the trip to Iowa.