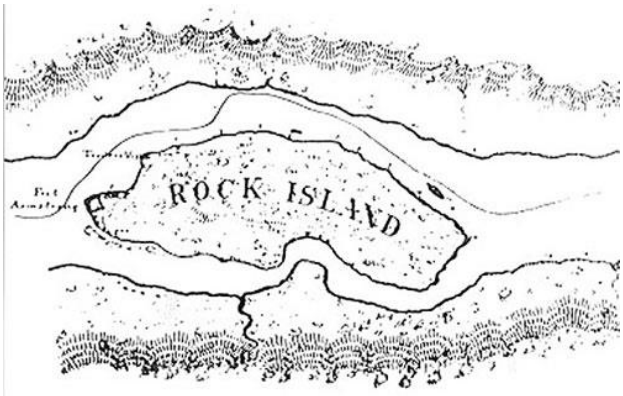
23. Covered Wagon Travel

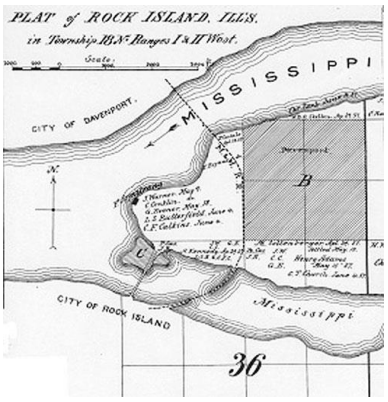
So Heinrich and Maria had many fellow travelers on their trip, even if they did take it in very early spring as I think they did. We will remember that my father was born November 25, 1853, in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Heinrich and Maria were in New Vienna living in their own residence when the 1854 Iowa State Census was taken. The date when the Dubuque County census was taken that year is listed as "unknown", but we estimate that it may have been taken in June or July. The 1854 Iowa State Census dates we have been able to find are the following: Clinton County July 3, Keokuk County July 6, Jefferson County June-July. Clinton County is about 50 miles south of Dubuque County, Jefferson and Keokuk Counties are about 150 miles southwest of Dubuque County. (The United States Federal Census was taken on June 1 in most of the 1800s. From 1790 to 1820, the censuses were conducted on the first Monday in August (August 2, 1790; August 4, 1800; August 6, 1810; August 7, 1820); the 1830-1880 and 1900 censuses were taken on June 1; the 1890 census was taken on June 2; April 15 was Census Day in 1910; and the 1920 census was taken on January 1. Since 1930, Census Day has been April 1. *United States Census Bureau*.) To be on the safe side and because Heinrich and Maria were already living in their own domicile when the census was taken, we will propose that they were in Iowa by June 1. So they would travel between November 25, 1853 and June 1, 1854. Within that seven-month time frame there are multiple travel options, but I think we can narrow them significantly. I think Maria and Heinrich did not want to travel while Maria was pregnant because of the possibility of miscarriage or delivery complications on the trip. Maria was nearly 39 years old. So they chose to wait until after the baby was born. The postpartum period after a delivery is six weeks, during which mother and baby recoup health and strength. Heinrich would have left it up to Maria to determine when she was ready. So it is possible that Heinrich and Maria left as soon as the postpartum period was safely over, about January 15. The conventional thinking is that covered wagon travel should be taken in the summer when water and forage are more abundant, but as we have seen, pioneers did travel in the winter, and frozen ground actually provided some benefits for them, including easier small stream and river fording and possibly less mud. The most dangerous times to cross a river were when the ice was breaking up and during the spring thaws and flooding. Heinrich would have wanted to avoid those times. He could probably avoid the ice chunks in the river by waiting until March to leave Cincinnati, reaching the Mississippi River in April, but he may have had to deal with swift spring melt currents and mud in April and May. With a particularly hard freeze on the river there may have been ice chunks as late as April. Given the uncertainty about crossing the Mississippi River, I think Heinrich may have thought it was safer to travel in the early spring before ice melt and before too many pioneer wagons had churned up the mud on the trail.

We have already talked about the possibility of walking across the frozen Mississippi River. Let's revisit that briefly for more clarity. It was probably at Galesburg that Heinrich and Maria would start to gather as much information as possible about the current conditions of the river at the six major crossing areas. Burlington was the most southern crossing and seems to have been very popular in the fall and early winter of 1854-1855, as we have seen. Dubuque and Prairie du Chien were the northern-most crossings and for both those crossings the Mississippi was wide and shallower with a sluggish flow, which meant a more solid freeze. The crossing at Davenport, to which Heinrich and Maria were headed, was the narrowest crossing because of Rock Island in the middle of the river, but the main channel had strong currents, and the infamous Rock Island Rapids were just north of it, meaning that the river would not freeze as easily. For four months every winter this area was not navigable by steamship.

It was at Rock Island, one of the narrowest places on the Mississippi River, that they would have seen preparations under way for the building of the first railway bridge over the Mississippi River. The rapids on the river north of Rock Island made that area treacherous for steamships, and for at least four months of the year there could be no ferry crossing there because of the hazards of winter weather. A bridge was seen as the answer, and the first bridge was a railway bridge. Interestingly, this railway bridge is also famous for the attorney who handled the defense when the steamship companies sued the Rock Island Railroad for putting up a bridge, claiming the bridge was responsible for damage to one of its steamships that had crashed into the bridge support under suspicious circumstances. Many claimed the steamships were determined to stop the advancement of railroads because railroads would take away their business. The young attorney Abraham Lincoln was hired as lead defense counsel and defended the railroad vigorously. He also stated the opinion that the Rock Island Railroad Bridge would bring the two parts of the country together and open the entire west for commerce, thoughts that resonated positively with the jury. The trial ended in a hung jury, which meant that the railroad could not be stopped from rebuilding its bridge. The steamships continued to battle in court, taking the case all the way up to the Supreme Court, which, in 1867 ruled decisively that no one could prevent the building of bridges across bodies of water. The Rock Island Railroad bridge was completed in 1856. Let's look at a bit more information about Rock Island from *riveraction.org*.

When the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad was completed in 1854 it became the first to connect the East with the Mississippi River. One of the reasons the route to Davenport from Chicago was chosen was because of the relative ease with which the Mississippi could be bridged at Rock Island. This reach of the Mississippi River, the location of the Rock Island Rapids, is geologically youthful. Its narrow channel with a limestone island (Rock Island) could be used as a stepping-stone for the bridge. The first map below is courtesy of Augustana College and the second map is courtesy of the Rock Island District, U. S. Corps of Engineers.





At Rock Island the Mississippi River runs from east to west: Iowa is on the upper part of this map. Soon the Tri-Cities (today called the Quad Cities) would surround this island; Davenport, Iowa in the upper left, Rock Island, Illinois in the lower left, and Moline, Illinois in the lower right. In 1816 the U. S. government established Fort Armstrong at the west end of the island. The line through the main channel, north of the island, indicates the trace followed by steamboats through the dangerous Rock Island rapids. Upstream from Fort Armstrong is a piece of the island that protrudes out into the main channel of the river, labeled "Traders Vista." It is close to the location of a cabin (and later a house that remains today) occupied by George Davenport, who was the Fort's sutler

and trader of goods after whom the city was named. Apparently from this spot, Col. Davenport would look upstream and downstream for potential customers of his trade. Trader's Vista would become the location of the first bridge across the main channel of the river.

The question we need to ask is, "Did the Mississippi River freeze over at Davenport despite the strong current in the main channel?" Here is one documented answer:

> According to Roald Tweet, a retired English professor at Augustana College, Rock Island, and noted local historian who has written extensively about the river, the Mississippi River has indeed frozen over many times throughout history, but not in recent memory. Tweet said he believes that in 1853, a train actually slid onto the ice to unload its cargo onto a barge.

There are many instances of barges being iced in on the Mississippi River, and it would seem 1853 was one of these times. This would seem to indicate that the river at Rock Island did freeze and may have been frozen in 1854. So I think we might propose that Heinrich and Maria used the Davenport crossing if the river was sufficiently frozen. I think we could also propose that if it was not, they would have traveled further north to Dubuque to cross there.

We also need to ask how long a Mississippi River freeze lasts, so we can determine how late in the season Heinrich and Maria could have safely crossed it on foot. As we know, the St. Louis Post Dispatch reported on January 17th of 1854 that the river was frozen over completely in St. Louis. It would have been frozen north of St. Louis as well, including probably all of the crossings. We have no information about whether the great freeze recorded on January 17 of that year extended into February or March. There is documentation that in St. Louis in 1936 the ice was thick and solid on February 22, and started breaking up on February 26. There is also documentation that in 1960 the river was still frozen at St. Louis in March.

There are many variables to determine whether a river or stream will freeze, including air temperature, depth of water, movement of water, and salinity. Slow-moving, sluggish, or still water will freeze relatively quickly once the temperature reaches 32 degrees Fahrenheit or 0 degrees Celsius. The faster the water flows, the more kinetic energy it has to release the heat that deters freezing. As winter comes on, many streams and creeks dry up or slow down. Fast moving rivers will seldom freeze, and slow-moving rivers will seldom freeze solid, surface to bottom. However, there are exceptions in unusual circumstances. Some waterfalls will freeze, and some fast-moving rivers in the Arctic, for example. The giant Mississippi River was frozen solid to a depth of 13 inches at Cairo, Illinois in the year 1899. Cairo is about 400 miles south of Davenport. What we will propose is that Heinrich and Maria planned their trip so as to cross most large rivers by bridge, and that most of the smaller rivers and streams would either be frozen over or could be forded at a shallow place.

Now for the big question, "When did they leave Cincinnati?" One possibility is that they left after January 15, when my father was 1 ½ months old. Today we question the wisdom of taking a tiny infant on such a journey in the middle of the winter, but there is documentation in the literature of many infants and children on the pioneer journeys, including six-week-old infants. In addition, we routinely forget that our pioneer ancestors were more used to challenging climatic variations – they were simply "tougher" than we are today because they were used to harsher conditions. They would prepare for the trip accordingly. If they left in the middle of January, they would get to the Mississippi about February 21, allowing 16 days of comfortable travel to reach Indianapolis, 181 miles, with several days of rest in Germantown and Indianapolis, then 20 days from Indianapolis to

Moline (300 miles at about 15 miles a day.) However, this time could have been shorter or longer. There is documentation that oxen can travel double their usual speed.

"Ox traveling, when once a man becomes accustomed to it, is not so disagreeable as might be expected, particularly if one succeeds in obtaining a tractable animal. On emergencies, an ox can be made to proceed at a tolerable quick pace; for, though his walk is only about three miles an hour at an average, he may be made to perform double that distance in the same time. Mr. Galton once accomplished 24 miles in four hours, and that, too, through heavy sand!" lonehand.com

If we propose, as we have, that Heinrich and Maria stayed in lodging most of the time, they may have pushed their oxen hard sometimes from inn to inn, with minimum stops for water and food, knowing that the oxen would have food, water, and a night's rest in a barn or protected area. So the entire trip could be shortened significantly, meaning they might have left Cincinnati several weeks later, when Heinrich was two months old, and still reached the Mississippi River while it was frozen. Providing feed and water for their oxen would have been a priority. Heinrich would have attached bundles of hay wrapped in oiled cloth to the outside of the wagon for emergency rations for the oxen and would have rigged up barrels attached to the outside of the wagon to store water for the trip. The movement of the wagon would keep the water from freezing during the day. At night the water could have been drained and kept inside the inn lodging or even in the wagon if the family had to spend the night in the wagon. The back and front flaps of the wagon covering could be closed securely to keep out bad weather. If Heinrich and Maria needed to spend a night in their wagon, they would have parked both wagons parallel with enough room between them for the oxen. It is possible Heinrich and his companion rigged up a tent/windbreak for the oxen overnight. Typically covered wagon travelers had breakfast, stopped for lunch and rest around noon, then stopped for the night about 5:00 pm, leaving 8 to 12 or more hours for travel on the road each day. The focus for Heinrich and Maria's trip would have been speed and comfortable lodging, keeping the wagon light so that the children and at least one adult could always ride in it. Maria may have taken a turn walking next to the oxen. Heinrich may have rigged up a privy pail with a lid securely fastened to it in a corner of the wagon, so stops did not need to be made for toilet use. Maria would have provided for the comfort of her children with a hammock cradle for the baby and feather pillows and comforters that could double as seating to help minimize the bumping and jouncing movement of the wagon while traveling.

Now as we prepare to close this section on the migration trip from Cincinnati to New Vienna, let's review covered wagon travel by reading a wonderful monograph in the *Annals of Iowa* by Glenda Riley of the University of Iowa, *The Frontier in Process: Iowa's Trail Women As a Paradigm*, with information taken from the journals and diaries of pioneer women. Though the monograph is long, we will include about half of it because it is an excellent way to close our study of covered wagon travel.

In many ways, the Iowa-bound trail was typical of other frontier trails, especially those to family-farm frontiers. As such, the Iowa trail is a useful case study. It was an episode which began with early white squatters in Iowa's Half-Breed Tract in 1828 and had more or less vanished by 1870, the United States Census Bureau's official closing date for the Iowa frontier. Its travelers originated primarily in the farm areas of the Ohio Valley, then in the southern states, the middle states, the New England states, and other countries.

From these factors several additional characteristics of the Iowa trail can be intuited. The abundance of families indicates a high proportion of women and children on the trail. The capital needed to make the trek, purchase seed and tools, and invest in land suggests that, despite popular belief, the very poor were not common among the migrants. And the fact that most migrants were agrarian in background means that they already had some training in the skills they needed to make the westward move.

In other ways, the Iowa trail was less representative, particularly of overland routes to the Far West. Most Iowa-bound settlers were traveling over parts of the country which were comparatively well-settled, a situation which created a certain amount of ease for them in that they could occasionally buy supplies along the way and could sometimes stay at inns or campgrounds. References to fresh produce, friendly shopkeepers, and campgrounds established specifically for the covered wagon people abound in the diaries and letters of Iowa pioneers. This is not to argue that their time on the trail was easy, but there is little in their history or mythology to compare with the tragedy of those trapped for a winter at Donner Pass. Because of the settled nature of the countryside through which they traveled, Iowa-bound migrants had relatively little to fear in the way of confrontations with Native Americans. President Andrew Jackson's removal policy, and outright genocide had essentially cleared the portion of the United States lying northeast of the Mississippi River of native populations. Indians valiantly resisting white encroachments did not play a notable role in the recounting of the Iowa trail saga. Moreover, besides moving through populous countryside, these settlers were moving westward in a time period marked by increasing industrialization and technology which supplied them with a variety of modes of transportation. Legend to the contrary, the covered wagon was not the only alternative in existence in mid-nineteenth-century America. Given the media image of pioneers, it is rather startling to learn that many of them actually opted for other means of conveyance to the Iowa frontier, like steamship and railroad, though both were expensive and posed problems.

In the face of these drawbacks, the overwhelming majority of Iowa's pioneers elected to use covered wagons. Although they had the deserved reputation of being slow and awkward, their unwieldy bulk accommodated family members, goods, equipment, and animals. The journey would take considerably longer than it would by boat or rail, but the migrants would enjoy the initial advantage of having their belongings, seed, and stock with them in a territory with little surplus. And, if necessary, the prairie schooner, as it was known, could even become a temporary home for the settlers when the trail finally came to a welcome end.
Although they did not express it overtly, most pioneers recognized the trail as the beginning of the frontier. Realizing the magnitude of their undertaking they focused their mental and physical efforts on each minute detail of the trip ahead. They already knew from emigrants' guides, word-of-mouth, and personal accounts that any small oversight or lack of attention to a petty detail could make the difference between success and failure, between survival and destruction. So family members worked on the necessary preparations as a team.

They chose from two basic types of covered wagon: the large Conestoga wagon which was approximately fifteen feet long, five feet wide, and five feet deep or the smaller, lighter Emigrant wagon which measured about ten feet in length, four feet in width, and two feet in depth. Their choice was based on how much they wanted to carry and how fast they wanted to travel. In either style they looked for a sturdy, well-constructed box which would not shake apart on some desolate stretch of trail. Once the wagon was selected, the men were expected to equip it with running gear

as well as to find and train suitable animals to haul it and its contents hundreds of miles through sun, dust, rain, mud, and snow. From one-half to three quarters of covered wagons were the simple farm wagons, or the slightly larger “prairie schooners, which were still typically built on a farm wagon bed.

Once the frame of the wagon was built, the women took over, for the final segment of the wagon consisted of the cloth top, the production of which was assigned to the women of the family due to their familiarity with fabrics and their sewing skills. This was a long-term and difficult job since the top was frequently stitched by hand. In planning a wagon cover for one of their journeys, Kitturah Belknap explained that she would "make a muslin cover for the wagon as we will have a double cover so we can keep warm and dry; put the muslin on first and then the heavy linen one for strength. They both have to be sewed real good and strong and I have to spin the thread and sew all those long seams with my fingers." According to Belknap, time and expertise by the woman or women were the two essential ingredients needed to produce a roof which would successfully shelter the travelers from inclement weather during their long westward journey.

They also utilized every possible space on the outside of the wagon box to hang buckets of grease to be used for the axles, barrels of water for the stock, and spare parts for the wagon. Then they busied themselves training the team that was to pull the wagon as well as preparing the family's other stock for the long journey ahead. At the same time women took the primary responsibility for items of food, clothing, and medicine which they began to prepare well in advance of the day of departure. Kitturah Belknap left a detailed account of her preparations which consumed all her spare moments during an entire winter. I have to make a feather tick for my bed ... the linen is ready to go to work on, and six two bushel bags all ready to sew up . . . have cut out two pair of pants for George ... I have worked almost day and night this winter, having the sewing about all done but a coat and vest for George. Will wash and begin to pack and start with some old clothes on and when we can't wear them any longer will leave them on the road.

With the experience of one other migration behind her, Belknap knew what would be needed so despite her exhaustion and ill health she also dipped enough candles to last a year; prepared a complete medicine chest; packed home-sewn sacks with flour, corn meal, dried fruits, and other foodstuffs; assembled dishes and cooking pots; and cooked enough food to last the first week. Her final preparation was to put together a workbasket of sewing so that she wouldn't have to spend any idle moments during the trip. Meanwhile her husband, George, built an ingenious camp table, practiced with the oxen he had selected to draw their wagon, and readied the other stock for travel. It has been estimated that a fully-packed wagon ranged from 1500 to 2000 pounds, not counting the additional weight of their human passengers. A common practice, which soon became an accepted part of trail lore, was sewing canvas pouches to the inside of the wagon cover. Catherine Haun found their "pockets" invaluable for small items which needed to be kept in easy reach such as cooking knives, firearms, and toilet articles.

They also had to begin the process of psychological separation from their families, friends, and neighbors long before they actually began bending the trail grass. The trauma of parting cannot be overemphasized. Unlike modern society where the average person moves many times in his or her life, most nineteenth-century people were accustomed to being part of a region, a town, a neighborhood, and a kinship network. These people shared value systems, social life, customs, and traditions. They shared the joy and the tragedy of births, weddings, and deaths. They called upon

each other for help in times of crisis. And they gathered together to pray or to celebrate a holiday. Defying their brave attempts to invest the break with a festive air, the morning of the actual departure usually presented a heartrending scene. In the murky early morning light, people gathered around the migrants to help them load their wagon, to serve them breakfast, to grasp their hands one last time, and to wish them luck in the new country. As the covered wagons started out, townspeople often rode along for a while to keep the emigrants company before saying a final goodbye.

One observer went so far as to portray Iowa migration as a mass movement. As early as 1836 he claimed, “The roads were literally lined with the long blue wagons of the emigrants slowly wending their way over the broad prairies— the cattle and hogs, men and dogs, and frequently women and children, forming the rear of the van—often ten, twenty, and thirty wagons in company. Ask them, when and where you would, their destination was the ‘Black Hawk Purchase. . . . .”

“I can see now the two tracks of the road, cut deep by the wagon wheels and washed out by the rains.” These tracks became a kind of map for those who followed as well as a testimonial to those who had already completed the demanding journey. Whenever they had the opportunity, migrants would join with another group to swap information, to exchange bits of trail lore, or to travel together for as long as their routes coincided. McLaughlin remembered that at times they traveled alone, but when possible they joined with other "movers." She remarked that they "were always glad to have company, especially when fording swollen streams, for then we could double up teams and take turns in making the crossing." . . . .

One of the easier problems for them to resolve was their families' sleeping arrangements. The wagon presented itself as an obvious "bedroom" and many of the wayfarers took advantage of its minimal protection. The Titus party was delighted to find that its two wagons "were roomy enough for all," but they did not remark on the comfort or the space provided by their accommodations. Most groups found that all members would not fit into the wagons so they turned them over to the most-needy members: the aged, the ill, the small children, or the women with infants. The Harrises developed another alternative; whenever they could locate a tavern they boarded the women of the party there while the men slept nearby in the wagons. "Others utilized tents, deserted houses, or simply slept outside, using a variety of quilts, feather ticks, or com husk mattresses to shield them from the chill air and the unrelentingly hard ground.

Occasionally, some travelers were fortunate enough to be afforded shelter for a night by a friendly family who still remembered its own trek west. For Kitturah Belknap one instance of such hospitality was particularly welcome. The Belknap party crossed an eighteen-mile stretch of prairie in the freezing snow during which Kitturah drove the team so her husband could herd the stock. "I thought my hands and nose would freeze," she related. "When I got to the fire it made me so sick I almost fainted." Luckily, they were taken in by a family of eight people living in a tiny, isolated cabin. Belknap thawed out her frozen provisions for dinner and then, sick with a toothache, she bedded down on the floor with the other five members of her party. They arose at four a.m. in order to eat breakfast without disrupting their hosts and set off for more miles of snow-covered prairie somewhat refreshed by the brief interval spent indoors.

Using reflector ovens, prairie stoves, or just campfires, they concocted meals which ranged from adequate to wonderfully unforgettable. Lydia Titus was particularly adept at campfire cooking. She "fried home-cured ham or bacon with eggs" while she "boiled potatoes or roasted them in the hot ashes." The Lacey family settled for a cold lunch from a big barrel that Sarah had packed with suitable provisions, but at night she insisted upon cooking them all a hot meal over a campfire. She prided herself on always offering them "meat or eggs and a warm vegetable for all, as well as pie or cake." McLaughlin recalled a homey scene focusing on prairie chicken:

. . . father would bring water, build a fire and take down the little green table and splint-bottom chairs from the back of the wagon, while mother prepared the meal. We were at home on the prairie with prairie chicken for supper" Another woman's diary referred to cooking over an open fire, cooking in the rain, and cooking food on Sunday to be eaten during the first part of the following week. One Sunday her project of fixing beans was interrupted by a sudden rain shower. "Wasn't it a shame!" she lamented. "Mine were almost done when a shower came up and drove me into the wagon. The beans taking advantage of my absence burned up. Nothing was left for me but to cook more." Like many trail women, she augmented her cooking facilities with whatever resources came to hand. At one camp spot she made biscuits after obtaining permission to bake them in a nearby house and at another she prepared eggs on a borrowed camp stove. As the migrants neared Iowa, the task of food preparation became more difficult due to decreasing fuel supplies. The prairies did not readily yield wood for their fires so the pioneers often had to purchase wood just as they did food. When wood was totally unavailable, they twisted hay, prairie grass, or slough grass into "cats." This created an extra job for the women and children who had to spend hours in producing fuel by collecting and twisting the hay or grass, but it was perhaps more agreeable than the other widely employed option of collecting dried animal excrement, euphemistically called cow chips or buffalo-chips, for use as fuel.

Kitturah Belknap was a perfect illustration. Using a Dutch oven, a skillet, a teakettle, and a coffeepot, she devised meals which were just like "at home." These regularly featured her salt-rising bread which she worked at in between her other chores. “When we camped 1 made rising and set it on the warm ground and it would be up about midnight. I'd get up and put it to sponge and in the morning the first thing I did was to mix the dough and put it in the oven and by the time we had breakfast it would be ready to bake. Then we had nice coals and by the time I got things washed up and packed up and the horses were ready the bread would be done and we would go on our way rejoicing.”

Butter for the bread was not a problem for Belknaps either. When the cows were milked at night, she strained the milk into little buckets which were covered and set on the ground under the wagon. In the morning she skimmed off the cream, put it in the churn in the wagon, and after riding all day she had "a nice role of butter." Kitturah further supplemented their meals with foodstuffs bought along the way. She would keep her eye out for a farmhouse where she might purchase a head of cabbage, potatoes, eggs, or other fresh foods. She soon became trailwise: "where there were farms old enough to raise anything to spare, they were glad to exchange their produce for a few coins.”

In 1846 her remembrances are of a slightly different nature. She did, however, mention amenities such as camping at a farm, her mother and the baby staying in a hotel, staying in an emigrant campground, and buying milk from farms along the way. "From that point on her frame of mind

improved and she even surprised herself by offering, despite her lack of experience, to do all the cooking for her party when the hired cook quit." She found her companions to be "a wonderful collection of people," the youngest of whom was a six-week-old baby. Like the other women of the train, she helped drive the wagon, cared for the children, and caught up with her washing and mending on Sundays. Although they were passed by many discouraged emigrants returning east along the trail, she urged her husband onward. She was more than pleased that they were among the dozen or so people out of the original 120 in the train that reached Sacramento as scheduled.

Another problem of the prairie region, limited water supplies, made it increasingly difficult for the women to effectively wash the clothing and bedding of the party. When the rain barrels were full, when a farmhouse with a well was located, or when a stream was reached, the women and girls seized the opportunity to refresh garments dirtied and worn by traveling in heat and dust. Gould's note regarding clothes washing was typical. "At four p.m. I commenced and did a real large washing—spreading the clothes on the grass at sunset." At a later point in her diary she expressed shock because, while they were "laying over because it was the Sabbath," she discovered that "the women were doing up their week's washing."

The story of Lydia Titus is fairly representative. In 1869, when she and her husband resolved to make Iowa their new home, her young sister and her husband announced that they were going along. Both couples sold their farms and stock, "keeping only a wagon apiece and four horses," to transport themselves and their four children. Lydia had an eight-year-old daughter, a three-year-old son, and a ten-month-old girl while her sister had a six-week-old baby girl, yet neither woman visualized moving such young children as an extraordinary undertaking. They soon learned that they were not alone in their decision. There were many others, such as the Archers, who with four wagons were moving nineteen people; thirteen were children between the ages of two and the early twenties. For trail women, the problem of physically protecting the children was in all probability the most distressing aspect of childcare on the trail. Despite their constant vigilance, children often got too far off to the side of the road or lagged too far behind the train, causing their parents more than a few anxious moments. Furthermore, the possibility of accident, illness, and disease constantly hovered over them. Although they carried some medicines, they knew that the services of a doctor would be virtually unobtainable in case of serious trouble. Elisha Brooks always remembered the starkness of the situation when illness hit him and the other children of his party.

Women also engaged in the battle against sun scorched prairies, biting snowstorms, mud sloughs, and wide streams and rivers. The latter could often be forded or ferried across with comparative ease, but in some cases their depth or flooded condition due to a recent storm presented a great barrier to settlers, their wagons, and their animals. This resulted in some classic tales of groups pushing ahead with the help of their women. In 1832, for example, Caroline Phelps and her husband were stymied by flooded Sugar Creek which they finally crossed by swimming on horseback and floating on driftwood. In the process, Phelps, who already suffered an eye swollen shut by an infection, was knocked down and kicked in the forehead by a frightened horse. She roused herself sufficiently to pick up her baby and get them both across the creek, after which the men of the party brought their wagon across in pieces. Her comment on the affair demonstrated her vigor: "we had a good supper and a good bed . . . the next morning I was quite refreshed." . . . .

When the Shuteses reached the Mississippi, they learned they had just missed a bad flood which had prevented crossings of any kind for several weeks. "Not just too much water," they were informed, "but too much trash and big trees that would smash anything in their way." Fortuitously, Hiram had been advised to arrive ahead of his party and get their name "in the pot" for a place on the ferry so they had to wait less than a day. When they left their camp spot and approached the ferry, they were quickly caught up in the excitement of throngs of people, escalating noise levels, animated talk of high water, and piercing blasts from the whistle of the steam-powered ferry. As they gradually edged up the loading plank, the men took responsibility for the wagons, the children led the blindfolded horses, and the mother shepherded the small children. Once out upon the swirling waters, Shutes felt that her mother had "the real job sitting on a chair holding the baby and Howard." For some women, the crossing was not this easy. In the mid1860s a lone woman who had already managed moving herself and four children under age eleven to join her husband in Iowa, was appalled to learn that cracking ice on the Mississippi River prevented teams from transporting any more settlers over it that winter. She was told that she would have to wait until the ice cleared and the ferries began to run again. Faced with four exhausted children and a diminished cash reserve, she decided to join a few others who were walking to Iowa over the groaning ice floes. She picked up the baby, distributed the luggage among the older children, and set out. Her daughter later recounted their perilous crossing: I can see yet, as in a dream, that great expanse of gray ice. Even then it was cracking, and as we went on there was a low grinding sound ... we were constantly warned not to crowd together or we would break through. Mother who, with all her burdens, was clipping along with the rest would call out cheering and encouraging me to come along. I don't think she had realized how wide the river was, how far the distant shore. When asked what had given her the courage to keep going across the splitting ice, she replied, "I was thinking of your father and all he had been writing about you children growing up in Iowa."

So, my Little Dear One, thinking about all these things, let's imagine how my grandparents might have made their overland covered wagon trek from Cincinnati to New Vienna. We will imagine that they had agreed to travel with a young couple, Karl and Rose, who had a one-year-old baby. Karl was a successful carpenter who wanted to build houses, and his wife was a seamstress who had worked in a busy dress shop. Karl had learned from the Sudmeiers in Cincinnati about the new town of Dyersville, Iowa, founded in 1848 by James Dyer. It was not too far from New Vienna and was laid out in 1851 by the ambitious young man who had a great vision for Dyersville. He wanted to build a city. Karl wanted to be part of those big plans. James Dyer laid out the plans for his city on a grid. In 1845 forty-two people from Bavaria in Germany had left Bavaria and sailed up the Mississippi River from St. Louis, landed at Dubuque in 1846 and decided to settle in what was to become Dyersville. Karl thought that he and his wife would fit in well with these Germans, and that he could build the homes that James Dyer envisioned. So Heinrich and Karl made plans together.

It is good to remember that the pioneer way is one of clever and determined thrift, not deprivation, so the two couples would have chosen a route that maximized their comfort while staying within a budget. They would have packed the minimal things they would need for the journey and planned most of their lodging stops, thanks to long hours spent perusing letters from people who had traveled to New Vienna, talking with relatives and friends who had made the trip, and reading guidebooks. Maria and Rose packed some bacon, flour, coffee, tea, rice, beans, dried apples and peaches, dried biscuits, maybe some eggs and cornmeal. They packed a medicine kit, sewing kit, clothes and bedding for the family, toys for the children, candles, lanterns, a charcoal heater or iron stove. Heinrich and Karl packed a gun, hunting knife, ammunition, tools and axle grease, a tarp and provisions for the animals, and they outfitted the wagons for comfort and ease in traveling, with hanging pouches for storage, hammock cradles, pull-down small tables, etc. We know that we cannot be certain of the route they chose, but we have made our decision on the route we think they may have taken, and we will follow that with them now.

They left Cincinnati early one cold morning toward the end of January in 1854, with hot bricks placed on a layer of tin on the floor of the wagon, and spent a full day on the trail, arriving late afternoon in Reading, about 14 miles to the north through the Miami River Valley. Heinrich and Maria knew some families there and stayed the night with one of them, happy for the warmth and companionship, happy that their children were out of the confines of that small wagon, happy that their oxen were bedded down in the barn with hay and water. Maria and Rosa probably boiled water to wash the babies' diapers and any other soiled clothes, and helped their host prepare the evening meal. Heinrich and Karl tended to the wagons, greased the axels, checked the wheels and oxen yoke, etc. They probably also helped their host do the evening chores of feeding the animals and milking the cows. Maria may have presented her host friend one of her special homemade candles as a gift.

At daybreak the next morning Maria and Rose helped cook a hearty breakfast for everyone while the men did the morning chores. After breakfast they gathered their belongings and packed them back into the wagons, filled the water barrels, placed the hot bricks in the beds of the wagons, yoked the oxen, and were on their way again, after sober and possibly tearful goodbyes. That day they traveled about 16 miles from Reading to Mason, again staying with acquaintances for the night. The following day they could have traveled from Mason to Lebanon, about 8 miles, and stopped there for the night; or, if the weather was particularly good and the roads clear of ice and snow, they may

have decided to push on another 10 miles to Franklin, where they would be crossing the Miami River. Here they again found a friendly German family with whom to spend the night, and their host may even have been a breeder of fine racehorses. From Franklin they traveled the next day to Germantown 8 miles, arriving early afternoon and enjoying the company of their German hosts, perhaps with a long evening of impromptu singing and dancing. Heinrich would also have talked with the men about the best way to reach the National Road from Germantown, going north to Dayton or angling northwest to Eaton if the cholera epidemic there were finished. The next day they rose early and crossed the bridge over the Miami River to continue on their way to Gratis, 9 miles. If these roads were not as good as the road to Dayton, they might spend the night in Gratis and continue on early the next day to Eaton, another 9 miles of travel. Or they might choose to go straight through to Eaton, 18 miles. From Eaton on the following day they would travel about 11 miles to connect with the National Road, finding an inn along the National Road to spend the night and then traveling the next day the 16 miles to Richmond in Indiana. In Richmond there were many Quaker families, and we can assume that our travelers stayed with one of the families. Then came the estimated five days of travel to Indianapolis on the National Road, about 75 miles, traveling fairly quickly because the road was paved and there were bridges across the streams and rivers. As we have learned, oxen taken care of well could comfortably pull the wagons for 16-18 hours a day. The travelers would stay in taverns and inns each night.

Once they reached Indianapolis they would have searched out the German people they had been referred to, and settled in for a day or two of rest, enjoying the culture of that city, visiting the sights, washing clothes, cleaning the wagons, replenishing wagon stores, repairing or buying new wagon wheels, tending to the needs of their oxen, etc. After their rest in Indianapolis the travelers resumed their journey northwest on today's highway 74, 49 miles to Crawfordsville and from there all the way to Davenport. We have discussed this part of the trip in some detail already, and we have decided that they would cross the Mississippi River at Davenport. The remaining part of the trip from Davenport to New Vienna was about 90 miles, and they may have followed today's highway 61 to Dubuque and then today's highway 20 west to Dyersville, staying with German families along the way. In Dyersville they may have spent the night with Sudmeier relatives. The next day Heinrich and Maria would have said goodbye to Karl and Rose, while a friend on horseback rode the five miles to New Vienna to tell Maria's brothers that Heinrich and Maria were on their way. Then the brothers would have ridden out to meet the travelers and escort them to their new home in New Vienna, Iowa.