

WHITE WOMEN TRAVELLING ON THE OREGON-  
CALIFORNIA TRAIL 1845-1885: THE JOURNEY  
MADE INTO AN EXHIBIT

By

MELISSA MEYER

Bachelor of Science Secondary

Education

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

2010

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
May, 2014

WHITE WOMEN TRAVELLING ON THE OREGON-  
CALIFORNIA TRAIL 1845-1885: THE JOURNEY  
MADE INTO AN EXHIBIT

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Bill Bryans

---

Dr. Ron McCoy

---

Dr. L.G. Moses

---

Name: MELISSA MEYER

Date of Degree: MAY, 2014

Title of Study: WHITE WOMEN TRAVELLING ON THE  
OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAIL 1845-1885: THE JOURNEY  
TURNED INTO AN EXHIBIT

Major Field: HISTORY

Abstract: Between 1845 and 1885, more than half a million people traveled on the Oregon-California Trail to the West. Many women made the journey and wrote about their experiences. Through their journals, women related the hardship and loneliness of the Oregon-California Trail. Often, the women had similar journeys, but each also had her own unique story to tell. The stories of the women on the Oregon-California Trail are important to Western History and should be exhibited for people to discover women's roles on the Oregon-California Trail.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. CHAPTER 1.....	
Stereotypes of Women of the Oregon-California Trail.....	4
III. CHAPTER 2.....	
Who Went West on the Oregon-California Trail?.....	14
IV. CHAPTER 3.....	
The Preparations.....	24
V. CHAPTER 4.....	
Fears and Expectations.....	33
VI. CHAPTER 5.....	
Sadness in Leaving Home.....	40
VII. CHAPTER 6.....	
The Journey.....	47
VIII. CHAPTER 7.....	
The Process of Making Exhibits.....	84
IX. CHAPTER 8.....	
Converting it into an Exhibit.....	97
REFERENCES.....	107

Chapter	Page
APPENDICES.....	
Appendix 1.....	113
Appendix 2.....	119

## Introduction

The story of the Oregon-California Trail is an interesting and important story in the expansion of the United States. Many people who live in the West have family members who traveled across the plains in a covered wagon. I found my family's journey across the plains on a covered wagon in during the late 1870s and 1880s. I was helping my grandma clean out her attic when I was looking through some old papers and found a letter and a journal of my great-great-grandfather, Christian Ummel. He moved to the United States in search of better farmland. He travelled from New York to Iowa in 1873 in a covered wagon. He then travelled to Missouri in 1878, but was unhappy with the farmland. He then set out from Missouri for Colorado in 1882 with a wagon party of a few families. He never made it to Colorado because he found the western Kansas prairies good for farming. Although, he never travelled on the Oregon-California

Trail, his story made me want to know more about the men and women who travelled in covered wagons on the trail.

Throughout the journal, he mentioned his wife and children but did not go into much detail. I wanted to know more about what her life would have been like and what her journey was like. I decided to research the white women of the Oregon-California Trail to learn more about what my family and the women of my family would have experienced.

The Oregon-California Trail is a great story of the West and the expansion of the United States. However, there are many different stories within that story. There were many people already living in the West, such as Native Americans who were affected by the settlement of white people in the West. The Native Americans lost much of their land to the government, which was later given over for settlement by non-natives. There were other people who travelled West on the Oregon-California Trail looking for land. For example, freed slaves could own land after 1862 and some travelled West for land. In addition, there were groups of men who set out for California and Colorado during the gold rush years. There are many more stories about the Oregon-California Trail.

For the purpose of this paper, the story will focus on white women who travelled on the Oregon-California Trail from

1845 to 1885. The focus will be the everyday lives of women on their journeys to the West. The purpose is to understand the women were the backbones of the families and helped on the Oregon-California Trail. The women were central to the success of the journey.

The women's stories should be exhibited to help people understand the crucial role woman played in the story of the Oregon-California Trail. The exhibit idea is for a temporary or travelling exhibit. The exhibit plan is a basic idea for how to get started making an actual exhibit about white women travelling on the Oregon-California Trail.



## Chapter One

### STREOTYPES OF WOMEN ON THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAIL

Women of the Oregon-California Trail were brave and tough. They took up the spirit of Manifest Destiny and traveled into the "uncivilized" West. They endured stormy weather and bad roads in hopes of a new and better life.

Historians often debate and discuss the women of the Oregon-California Trail. A few fit the women into nice and neat stereotypes, as if thousands of women can fit nicely into any stereotype. Other historians show a more well-rounded view of women of the Oregon-California Trail. These historians try to show women as individuals, with each having her own story to tell.

The early writing of West often excluded women from the story. The West was a "man's world" and the story of how the

West was conquered by Euro-Americans only included white men. Fredrick Jackson Turner omitted women from his writings about the West. Then, in the 1970s to the 1980s, the New Western History movement occurred. It focused on the minority groups of the West. Historians started to research and write about the women of the West. However, the early writings about women focused on the stereotypes.

The images and paintings of women in the West lead to the stereotypes of women as helpmates, gentle tamers, and bad women. Early in "New Western History Movement," historians attempted but failed go past these stereotypes. One historian, John Mack Faragher, focused on the stereotypical women of the West. Faragher wrote mainly on women and the family dynamic on the journey often portraying the women as submissive helpers. Lillian Schlissel often wrote about how the women actually lived on the trail but failed to break the stereotype myths. Many early writers failed to break the stereotypes and focus on the real story of women in the West.

Historians often portrayed women of the Oregon-California Trail as the civilizer or gentle tamer of the West. Many gentle tamers were women from the more eastern states and were women of a high class. The gentle tamers were often very frightened of the people in the West and the elements of the West. They might

also be called the refined ladies. The refined ladies were pure, and they discouraged cursing and drinking. These women were the schoolteachers, missionaries, or just a woman with "civilized" tastes. They are depicted as the women that bring civilization to an uncivilized world. That meant they influenced the men who are in the West, like the miners and ranchers. The women also brought religion and civilization to the Native Americans. The women had the responsibility of bringing social and cultural values of the East to the West. Reportedly, the dress, language, cleanliness and morality all improved once these women arrived in the West.<sup>1</sup> The refined lady was normally seen as a woman that is too genteel for the West. She was either uncomfortable, unhappy, or went crazy because of the frontier life.<sup>2</sup> The gentle tamers were often the women who are the victims in stories such as the Dime novels. She was depicted as unable to protect herself. In addition, these women were depicted in the background of paintings looking unhappy and scared. The women appeared sad and lonely, like they were forced to move with their families. The women were often unable to survive in the

---

<sup>1</sup>Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (Spring 1980): 173-213. 180.

<sup>2</sup>Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, *The Women's West*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. 1987. 12.

remote West. They either moved back East or to a more civilized area in the West.

Historians often place women into the stereotype of the helpmate. These women were normally pictured as reluctant women who are forced to follow their husband on the Oregon-California Trail to the West. These women were not as terrified of the West like the gentle tamers. The women were depicted with a sunbonnet in a covered wagon heading for the West with their husband and family, like in the image "Maddona of the Prairie". The helpmate was supposed to be in charge of the house while the men worked in the fields and made the money for the family. Women were confined to the home, and on the trail to the wagon, to do the domestic work. From observation, it was clear that home, marriage, and children were the focal point of the women's lives.<sup>3</sup> Women often held themselves responsible for home and hearth. This responsibility continued on the journey to the West. The women were in charge of the domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, and washing. They needed to be prepared to deal with little water to make food, wash clothes, and keep their families clean.

---

<sup>3</sup>Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains*. (University Press of Kansas, 1988), 42.

The helpmates normally adapted to the West and the environment, and in the process became stronger women, though they often struggled at the beginning with adapting. The women sometimes confronted loneliness in the West and feeling cut off from their family back in the East. After a while, the women stopped complaining about their conditions and learned to deal with the situation they faced. They finally realized that they were going to be in the West for the rest of their days and they should just get used to the idea of living in the West.

The helpmate is different from the gentle tamer in that she was not afraid and she adapted to the West. In addition, the women were helpful to the men on the Oregon-California Trail and after. The women kept to the moral and religious values of the East but adapted them to fit into the West. The women helped kill animals for food, defended against Native Americans, made clothes and soap, washed and cleaned the house and clothes, and helped in the fields.<sup>4</sup> The helpmate was less afraid to live in the West.

The helpmate stereotype was the most realistic. Many of the actual women who traveled on the Oregon-California Trail fit into this stereotype. There are many depictions of women in the

---

<sup>4</sup>Sandra Myers, *Westerning Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*. (University of New Mexico Press), 1982. 3.

West who performed chores such as doing the wash, cooking the meals, milking the cows, and feeding the chickens.<sup>5</sup> One image shows a pioneer women with a dead rattlesnake in her hand. She defended her home from nature and keep out the bugs, snakes, and other animals<sup>6</sup>. Some wood etchings in magazines sensationalized the idea of women versus nature. One showed a mother having to protect her baby in a crib from a grizzly bear in the home.<sup>7</sup> These etchings go too far from reality. However, most of the images of the helpmates portray how women really lived. In addition, historians like Susan Myers and the later works of Lillian Schlissel used the journals of the women to come up with the helpmate idea. Historians based the idea off the daily lives of women and the kinds of chores and tasks they performed.

The other women that do not fit into the sterotype of the civilizer or the helpmate was the bad women. These women are protrayed as breaking the rules and not acting properly. They are often prostitutes, but they can also be women that shot guns, smoked and cursed in public, and chose not to wear skirts and maintain the home and hearth. Theses women are often referred to as "soiled doves."

---

<sup>5</sup>Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Pioneer Women: The Lives of Women on the Frontier* (Norman; University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 101, 102, 106.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 63.

Some of the women in the West who traveled on the Oregon-California Trail from 1845-1885 did fit into these stereotypes. But there were many women who did not and historians have focused on those women as well. More recently, historians have attempted to convey the story of real women who traveled on the Oregon-California Trail and lived in the West. These historians show how the women did more than maintain the home and hearth or civilize the people of the West.

Historians now write more accurately about women of the Oregon-California Trail. Historians rely less on the images of the women in the West and rely more on the journals, diaries, and other primary sources to understand women in the West. Now, historians show women as more than a stereotype. Historians try to depict all women who lived in the West for who they were. Historians like Sandra Myres, Linda Peavy, and Ursula Smith write about women as individuals. These historians understand the importance of not stereotyping women and help the readers see that the stereotypes are not accurate. Historians now try to show the reader that each woman who lived in the West and traveled on the Oregon-California Trail was different and had a unique understanding and views of life in the West.

Historians include all women into the story of the Oregon-California Trail. This includes women who moved to the West

alone, immigrant women and families, women who moved willingly, and the list goes on. In general, women on the Oregon-California Trail are now portrayed more accurately and historians are relying less on the images and more on the writing of the women themselves. Consequently, the stereotypes are becoming irrelevant. This is important in understanding the West and understanding women's role in the region.

Women who lived in and traveled to the West on the Oregon-California Trail were complex, strong, and unique. Many of the women of the Oregon-California Trail shared similar journeys to the West. They are an important part of the history of the West because they helped expand the United States. These women made up a large portion of the people who traveled West and settled the land. Through their journals and diaries, the women shared their stories of the Oregon-California Trail and the call to go West. The journals shared personal thoughts and feelings of the women on the journey. The women of the Oregon-California Trail and their stories should be shared with the public and should be exhibited in museums such as Rinehart Stone House Museum in Oregon and places like The National Oregon/California Trail Center. The women who travelled the trail were the backbone of their families and helped get their parties to the West. The women sacrificed their lives and their comfort of home and sense



of self to go West and settle the land. Women struggled, sacrificed, and toiled on the journey, and their story is important in understanding the history and settlement of the West.

"New Western Historians" brought women back into the story of the West. Women both fit into the stereotypes and broke the stereotypes. Some women on the Oregon-California Trail only traveled because their families were going, and others traveled for new opportunities and maybe a better life. The best way to show women of the Oregon-California Trail is to portray them as they were. Some women were scared, brave, reluctant, and excited. Ultimately, even though the stereotypes had many truths and women often somewhat fit into those narrow categories, each woman was an individual and felt differently about the journey on the Oregon-California Trail. Historians now have learned to not categorize the women and write a more complete view of their experience on the Oregon-California Trail.

An exhibit about women of the Oregon-California Trail should attempt to explain that the women and their journeys were all different. Many admittedly shared common experiences, but no two women had the same journey. The exhibit should not try to fit women into any stereotype. It would be best to try to show experiences women shared in common and point out some unique

experiences women had. Some of the common experiences of the women were the preparation for the journey, the journey itself, the problems the women faced on the journey, and the settling of the women after the journey. The exhibit should explain the women's daily lives on the Oregon-California Trail.

## Chapter Two

### WHO WENT WEST ON THE OREGON- CALIFORNIA TRAIL

A vast amount of untouched free land waiting for farmers to plant and grow, gold waiting in mines to be unearthed, these lures motivated many Americans to pick up their lives and travel on the Oregon-California Trail to the West.<sup>1</sup> Up until the 1840s, the United States government restricted the travel into the West with the Trade and Intercourse Acts. These Acts were effective from 1790 to 1834. The government thought it best to restrict white men's travel into Native American lands because of misunderstanding that led to violence and conflict. It also harmed the Native American resources. Anyone who wanted to travel onto Native American lands needed permission from the government or that person was punished. The government wanted to minimize the violence and have an orderly pattern of Western

---

<sup>1</sup> The Oregon-California Trail is also known as the Oregon-California-Mormon Trail or the Overland Trail. This starts around in Missouri or Iowa and ends in Oregon or California.

settlement. However, after 1834, the government became more relaxed on the travel into Native American lands.<sup>2</sup> The government decided the travelers would have a minimal interaction with Native Americans and allowed people to travel into the West unrestricted.

In 1837, there was a financial panic followed by an economic depression. With the population growing, the dire economic situation, and people wanting more land, the government passed the Preemption Act of 1841. This allowed anyone who squatted on public land for fourteen months to have first right to the land after it was surveyed. The set limit was 160 acres of land at a set minimum price.<sup>3</sup> Many travelers thought the new land would be better, more fertile, and an opportunity for a new start.

The financial panic of 1837 and the following depression hurt many farmers. There was an overproduction of food and not enough demand for it. That put many farmers in a tough spot. The price for this commodity dropped and many farmers went into debt. The cost of wheat was low, and steamboats used lard and

---

<sup>2</sup>Michael Tate, *Indians and Emigrants; Encounters on the Overland Trail*. (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. 2006), 21

<sup>3</sup>Keith Meldahl, *Hard Road West* (The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 72.

bacon for fuel because the price was so low.<sup>4</sup> Farmers and their families faced many hard decisions and tough times. With the lands opening in the West farmers thought, they could find better land and new opportunities.

Many of the first travelers on the Trail were farmers and their families looking for better farming land and heard the West had wonderful land. The farmers were looking for "Eden", the idea of land that could grow better crops. The farmers heard speeches by Ohio Senator Ben Ruggles, who said, "This surely is the greatest region of the country on 'that little speck called Earth.'"<sup>5</sup> They were looking to leave behind failed farms and growing debts. What they found was a harsh new environment along the Oregon-California Trail and unfamiliar land to work with in the West.

However, this did not stop the many men and women from pouring into the West. Throughout the 1840s, many people traveled the Oregon-California Trail. They endured the rough weather and the harsh trail to claim land and expand the United States. The journalist, John O'Sullivan in 1845, first wrote about the idea of Manifest Destiny. He said western expansion

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Sandra Myers, *Westerning Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*. (University of New Mexico Press), 1982. 14.

represented, "the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence".<sup>6</sup> Many people thought westward expansion was a God-given right. The United States and the people were to expand and claim the land all the way to the Pacific. Women in particular wrote in their journals along the trail in part because they believed they were a part of a great moment in history.

In 1850, the Oregon Donations Land Claim Act passed. This act granted 320 acres of designated areas free of charge to every unmarried white male citizen eighteen or older and 640 acres to every married couple arriving in the Oregon Territory before December 1, 1850. The husband and wife both owned the 640 acres, half to each person. The law was one of the first that allowed married women in the United States to hold property under their own name. In addition, half-blood Native Americans could claim land in Oregon Territory. A provision in the law granted half the amount to those who arrived after the 1850 deadline but before 1854.<sup>7</sup> All people who claimed land had to live on the land and cultivate it for four years to own it

---

<sup>6</sup>Meldahl, *Hard Road West*, 72.

<sup>7</sup>"The Donation Land Claim Act, 1850: An Act to create the Office of Surveyor-General of the Public Lands in Oregon, and to provide for the Survey, and to make Donations to Settlers of the said Public Lands," Center for Columbia River History website(<http://www.ccrh.org/comm/cottage/primary/claim.htm>) accessed January 31, 2014.; Meldahl, *Hard Road West*. 72.

outright. This law pushed people West in more numbers. The idea of Manifest Destiny grew and the Oregon-California Trail became more crowded with families trying to claim free land in the West.

In 1862, The Homestead Act passed. The idea was to open more territory and expand the United States further. Manifest Destiny and the Jeffersonian ideals of yeomen farmers continued.<sup>8</sup> The act required a three-step procedure: file an application; improve the land; and file for a deed of title. The act allowed anyone who had never taken up arms against the United States government, and was twenty-one years or older, to claim public land. This included women and freed slaves. The person had to live on the land for at least five years and show that they made improvements to the land.<sup>9</sup> The act prompted more people including women and freed slaves to travel West.

The 1840s to 1860s promised free land to people of the United States and the idea that Westward expansion was a God-given right. Thousands of people took up the call for free land in the West. Many women traveled to the West with their

---

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Jefferson believed in democracy and that it should expand to the West. He wanted equality of political opportunity, with a priority for the "yeomen farmer". The yeomen farmer is a person who owns the land and can provide everything they need on the farm.

<sup>9</sup>Act of May 20, 1862 (Homestead Act), Public Law 37-64, 05/20/1862; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.; Meldahl, *Hard Road West*, 72.

families, and some traveled alone because they could for the first time claim free land on their own.

The reason why women traveled West is complex. Each had her own motives for the move. Many traveled for the land, some for the adventure, and some to keep their families together.

A number women traveled West with their families. Many of the earlier women travelers of the Oregon-California Trail were moving because their husbands wanted to move. In the beginning, women were unable to claim the land on their own. They could claim the land as a married couple and own half of the land. The women did not have many options if her husband wanted to move she; could move with him, or stay behind and lead a difficult life without a husband. The men held the power in the marriage and what they said prevailed.<sup>10</sup> The women understood that if they did not move with their husband the family would not stay together. These women were reluctant to move, but did make the journey to keep the family together.

Some women went West for the adventure. In 1849, the call of gold from California prompted many women and men to move West. The possibility of striking it rich and adventure called

---

<sup>10</sup>John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.), 2.; Elliot West, "Family Life on the Trail West." *History Today* December (1992), 33.



to many men and the women often traveled with them. However, most did not find gold, but the adventure seemed liked a good idea. Mary Jane Megquier left her children behind with family while she went West in search of riches in California. She, like many other women, did not go to California in search of gold; instead, she started up a hotel and worked hard to make money to support herself.<sup>11</sup> Many women understood that mining and panning for gold was most suited for men. Women started up inns and hotels to host the men as they searched for gold. The women would cook, clean, and provide shelter for the men. Some like, Margaret Frink, made a good amount of profit from the hotel business.<sup>12</sup> However, not all the women turned a profit on their adventures in the West. Many women would end up busted when the mining camp dried up and the men moved on to search for gold in other towns.

Many women went West on the Oregon-California Trail in search of land. Martha Morrison caught "Oregon Fever." She was looking for rich land to farm.<sup>13</sup> Most travelers on the trail were looking for rich farmland. They heard of the good weather in California and the better soil in the West and wanted to claim

---

<sup>11</sup>Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 64.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 38.

part of that land. Most of the women and families on the Overland Trail came from a farming background and the idea of good free land was too good to pass up on. The image of beautiful free land prompted many families into traveling West. Sarah Pratt Miner wrote that she and her party were leaving their "cherished homes and started for the "far west", that land of golden hopes & yellow fancies."<sup>14</sup> The West was full of new hopes and possibilities for many people.

Some of the people looking for free land were trying to escape from the debt they accumulated from the panic of 1837 followed by the rough economy after. They needed to put their lives behind them and start new in the West. The West was a place for the women to possibly have a better life.

Women had their different reasons for going West. Nevertheless, one by one they each made the journey and started new lives in the West. Some prospered and some had a difficult life in the West.

Many different women traveled on the Oregon-California Trail. The majority of the women on the Oregon-California Trail were from farming background and came from the Mid-Western

---

<sup>14</sup>Letter from Sarah Pratt Miner, April 1852, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 173.

states of Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri.<sup>15</sup> Many women who traveled on the Oregon-California Trail had already made a major move before, so they had an idea of what to pack for the journey and were more prepared for the challenges of the trail. Many were younger women who were newly married with either no children or younger children. This made up about thirty- eight percent of the people traveling West.<sup>16</sup> The families were just starting out and felt they could move to better their situation and start their lives in the West. A few older women and their families made the journey West.<sup>17</sup> This was likely because the journey would be more difficult and building a new farm and home would be harder for older couples.

A few women were from the more Eastern states and were less prepared to travel on the trail. These women did not adapt as well to the daily troubles of the trail. The women were not used to the constant uncomfortableness of the wagon and the heat. However, many of the women eventually overcame the obstacles on the trail and adapted to life in the West and on the Oregon-California Trail.

---

<sup>15</sup>Faragher, *Women and Men of the Overland Trail*, 19.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 19.

The men and women of the Oregon-California Trail generally came from a background of farming in the Mid-West. They saw the free land as a great opportunity. Each woman, no matter what her background or reason for going West, gathered her courage and began making her preparations for the long journey ahead.

## Chapter Three

### THE PREPARATION

A fifteen-foot covered wagon was all the space women had in which to pack all their cherished possessions and all the other necessary items for their family's journey. Women faced many crucial decisions about what was packed and what would stay behind. Each item taken for the journey had to be practical and useful to the family. There could be no wasted space in the wagon because the animals could only pull so much weight. The preparation for the journey on the Oregon-California Trail was difficult for many women. The women researched and gathered information about what the journey would be like and what items were required for the journey. Though women were unclear about the dangers they would face on the journey, they did have an idea of how to pack their wagons. Every year in the early spring, newspapers printed articles that described what kind of

people should go West and what to pack for the journey.<sup>1</sup> There was a letter published in *The New York Times* that described what a person should bring on their travels. The letter stated, "It must be borne in mind that there are no stores and blacksmith's shops on the prairies, and you must start always prepared for accidents of wear and tear, and breakage."<sup>2</sup> The article further advised, "But no one should attempt it [the journey West] unless fully prepared for every hardship."<sup>3</sup> At the end of the piece, was a list of all the supplies needed. It included how much of each item to pack and the total cost of the trip. Such newspaper articles helped women prepare their own wagons. One article described the difficulties of the road for the animals. It observed, "Travelers all go on horseback. The party pronounced the roads miserable, no traveling by night; a road full of stumps and trees- more of a trail than a wagon road."<sup>4</sup> The newspapers gave the women some idea that the Oregon-California Trail would be difficult.

---

<sup>1</sup>Many of the journals printed in the newspapers were journals of the women and men who made the journey West earlier.

<sup>2</sup>"Westward Ho!," *New York Times*, February 27, 1857.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"California Overland Mail Expedition." *New York Times*, January 11, 1858.

Women collected information about what to pack and what trails to follow from guidebooks. Local newspapers published information in the early spring to help those preparing for the Oregon-California Trail. The women collected those newspaper articles and made them into their own guidebooks. These guidebooks often comprised a collection of maps, travel routes, supplies, and information from letters, journals, and diaries of people who made the journey already. The guidebooks provided information about what clothes, food, utensils, and other supplies to pack. They also provided women with information about what trails to follow, where to camp, and where to find water.

Women wrote in their journals about the guidebooks. Rachel Miriam Taylor said, "Crossed this creek which is called in the Guide Book, Wood River and made better progress than usual, as the roads were smooth and level."<sup>5</sup> She also wrote, "Encamped near a small stream, where we found good grass, for our tired animals. In this days march, we passed a magnificent pile of rocks in the Guide Book [called] Scotts Bluffs."<sup>6</sup> The helpful

---

<sup>5</sup>Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, June 13, 1853, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 6: 1853-1854.* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 163.

<sup>6</sup>Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, July 21, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 6: 1853-1854.* 170.

tips about the landmarks let the women know where they were and how much further they had to travel.

The guidebooks usually contained good information women used to prepare for the journey. The guidebooks were the most helpful for the women who travelled the Oregon-California Trail later in the 1870s and 1880s because more information was collected by women who travelled earlier on the trail. Guidebooks provided women with important information about the land, the trails, and what to pack for the wagons.

Yet, women also found the guidebooks both helpful and harmful at times. The guidebooks gave good land references and provided helpful information about rivers. However, the early guidebooks especially did not provide good information about specifically what to pack for women's needs. One guidebook writer stated that, "although men would need special clothing for the trip, women needed nothing 'other than their ordinary clothing at home.'"<sup>7</sup> That advice harmed women. The regular clothes women packed were not warm enough at night and when wet took too long to dry causing women to become sick. Tamsen E. Donner wrote in a letter, "Linsey dresses are the most suitable for children. In deed if I had one it would be comfortable.

---

<sup>7</sup>Sandra Myers, *Westerning Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*. (University of New Mexico Press), 1982. 104.



There is a cool breeze at all times on the prairie that the sun does not feel as hot as one could suppose."<sup>8</sup> The Linsey was wool full-length dress that was warm and comfortable. The dress could have helped Tamsen stay warm on the journey. Tamsen also wrote about how her preparation could have been better. She advised a friend that bread was scarce and it was one of the main foods in her camp.<sup>9</sup> Tamsen was trying to advise her friend on what articles of food and clothing they should pack so they would not have as many problems on the journey.

Some guidebooks caused people to pack the wrong supplies, or not enough supplies. One advised women that only a few cooking utensils were needed for the journey. The guidebook suggested that only "a baking kettle, frying pan, tea-kettle, tea-pot and coffee-pot" were necessary for the trip.<sup>10</sup> The women found that more utensils were needed on the journey.

Guidebooks gave no advice on children. There was no mention of how to keep children entertained, out of danger, clean and dry, and healthy. The women had to learn as they traveled.

---

<sup>8</sup>Letter from Tamsen E. Donner, June 16, 1846, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails*. vol. 1: 1840-1849 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 71.;

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Myres, *Westering Women*, 104.

In addition, guidebooks offered no advice on how to adapt on the journey. Life on the trail required new methods on washing, cooking, sewing, and keeping the people in their parties healthy and safe.<sup>11</sup> There was nothing in the guidebooks about how to keep the inside of the wagon dry after a rain or clean it on a daily basis. The women had to learn as they went. Many early women travelers wrote about adjusting to the trail and new ways of doing chores such as using buffalo chips for firewood and cooking over an open campfire. The women passed this information on to other women travelling later on the trail, so their successors would be more prepared for the journey and what they might face on the Oregon-California Trail.

The early women and families did not have reliable guidebooks to follow along the trail. Some told of the journey taking only three to four months to get to Oregon or California, which was not unheard of, but it was rare. This mostly depended on where the party set out from, which the guidebooks failed to note.<sup>12</sup> The lack of information led families to not pack enough food or supplies for the longer journey. Families also did not

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Elliot West, "Family Life on the Trail West.", *History Today* December (1992), 33.

pack the right clothing for the unexpected weather.<sup>13</sup> Many started in the late spring and did not expect to be traveling in the fall months when the weather was colder.

Other early problems with the guidebooks were cut-offs. For the most part, there were two definite trails to follow which lead to Oregon or Californian. However, many guidebooks spoke of cut-offs that would save time on the trail. Guidebooks were not always reliable about these alternative routes and families sometimes ended up lost, stuck, or taking a longer time to get back on the main trail.<sup>14</sup> The problem with some of the cut-offs were they took the travelers away from water sources. That was dangerous for the people and the animals. In addition, the cut-offs were less traveled and the people did not know what to expect. In a letter to her cousin Virginia E.B. Reed wrote about her problems with the cut-offs. She and her family were members of the Donner party. Virginia and the Donner party ran into trouble in the mountains after taking one of these other cut-offs. She wrote to her cousin, "don't let this letter dishaten [*sic*] anybody and never take no cutoffs [*sic*] and hury

---

<sup>13</sup>Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 38.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 78.

[sic] along as fast as you can." <sup>15</sup> Most of the women's journals and later guidebooks advised women to stay on the trails and not to take the cut-offs after many travelers experienced problems.

Many guidebooks advised people to travel with family or a larger group. This was helpful information. According to Faragher, Schlissel, and Myres in the early years of travel on the Oregon-California Trail few families went on the trail alone because it was too dangerous. Therefore, families traveled in bigger groups with relatives or sometimes friends heading out on the same trail. However, sometimes problems arose in groups and they would split. These problems included which route to take and whether they should take a cut-off. <sup>16</sup> Often if the families hired help to go with them, the help would join up with other groups and leave. Traveling together benefitted the families because there was more helping hands with river crossing and everyday chores.

Mostly men wrote the early guidebooks; because the information was sometimes harmful, many women wrote their journals as alternative guidebooks to send to other family members who would be making the journey later. Women wanted to

---

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Virginia E.B. Reed. May 16, 1847, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol. 1: 1840-1849*. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Schlissel, *Women's Diaries*, 77.

prepare their families for what they may face on the trail.<sup>17</sup>

Tamsen Donner wrote a letter to a friend and said, "Our preparation for the journey, in some respects, might have been bettered. Bread has been the principal article of food in our camp. . . . And I fear bread will be scarce."<sup>18</sup> Abigail Duniway wrote a letter to her grandfather, which stated,

We see folks going to California and Oregon everyday; some are very poorly prepared . . . while others appear to have everything in order. We are fixed as well or better than any others. . . . I keep a journal and will send it to you when completed as I promised.<sup>19</sup>

Women wanted to ensure their family members would safely make the future journey and avoid the same problems on the trail they faced. The women also wrote about adjusting on the trail. They wrote about new ways of preparing food and doing chores differently.

---

<sup>17</sup>Letter from Margaret Ann Scott Fernside to James Scott, August 17, 1853, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 169.; Myres, *Westering Women*, 104.

<sup>18</sup>Letter from Tamsen E. Donner, June 16, 1846, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 1: 1840-1849.* 70.

<sup>19</sup>Letter from Abigail Jane Scott Duniway to James Scott, April 25, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 185; The Oregon Trail.* 145.

## Chapter Four

### FEARS AND EXPECTATIONS

Early women traveling West had many fears about what they might encounter along the trail. The guidebooks told stories of violent Native Americans the families might encounter. Women traveling with children feared "savages" would kidnap their children and they would never see them again or some other kind of mishap would happen with the Native Americans.<sup>1</sup> Women were unsure of the new land. They also disliked leaving behind civilization.<sup>2</sup> The women were concerned about children getting sick or lost. Some women were also afraid of the dangerous animals along the trail as well as bad weather and treacherous terrain. Abigail Jane Scott Duniway wrote one her first night

---

<sup>1</sup> Sandra Myers, *Westerning Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*. (University of New Mexico Press), 1982. 128.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 99.

traveling, "all are quite anxious to go to ahead."<sup>3</sup> Abigail and her party did not know what they would face on the journey and were nervous about the unknowns of the West. Women feared many things about their journey on the Overland Trail but mostly the women feared the unknown hazards that could happen along their journey.

Though women were unsure of exactly what to expect on the journey, they had some preconceived ideas from word of mouth stories of people who earlier made the journey. One such story that concerned women was that of the Donner party. Sallie B. Hester Maddock wrote in her diary,

We arrived at the place where the Donner Party perished, having lost their way and being snowed in. Most of them suffered and died from want of food. This was in 1846. . . . A few of their number made their way out, and after days of agony and hunger finally reached Sutter's Fort.<sup>4</sup>

Sallie and other women feared that they might face the same, or worse, dangers in the unknown land.

---

<sup>3</sup>Diary of Abigail Jane Scott Duniway, April 2, 1852, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.*(Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 144.

<sup>4</sup>Diary of Sallie B. Hester Maddock, September 14, 1849, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 1: 1840-1849* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 241.

Other fears women anticipated came from pamphlets, fliers, and newspaper articles. Sometimes local newspapers published warnings about the dangers along the journey. They published stories of early emigrants traveling on the trail. However, many times the newspapers left out the tragic events of the Oregon-California Trail. For example, the Donner party's story was told in the newspapers to show how difficult the journey was but the horrible details of cannibalism were left out so people would still want to travel the trail.<sup>5</sup> The stories did not fully prepare women for how hard the journey would be.

Some of them pictured women and children in danger from Indian attacks.<sup>6</sup> These fliers and pamphlets made women afraid of Indians attacking their wagons for supplies along the journey.<sup>7</sup> The women seldom had previous experience with Indians and so they believed the pamphlets and fliers to be true.

The pamphlets and fliers also pictured women and children as the victims of the "savage Indians."<sup>8</sup> The Indians had

---

<sup>5</sup>Unruh. *The Plains Across; The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860*. Urbana: (University of Illinois, 1979) 49.

<sup>6</sup>Peavy and Smith, *Pioneer Women*, 63.; Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Frontier Women*. (New York; Barnes and Noble Books. 1996), 39.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.



tomahawks and mean expressions in the pictures.<sup>9</sup> One caption on a pamphlet read, "Women and children falling victim to the Indian's Tomahawk."<sup>10</sup> The pamphlet further stated, "The merciless Savages have been as fatally engaged in the work of death on the frontiers; where great numbers (including women and children) have fallen victims to the bloody tomahawk."<sup>11</sup>



Figure 1

(Source: Peavy and Smith, *Frontier Women*, 39.)

The women pictured were weak and helpless. The pamphlets and fliers portrayed men having to defend the women and children. The images frightened the women about to travel West because

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

they believed the depictions to be real and women thought they would fall victims to the Indians.<sup>12</sup>

Other pamphlets and fliers showed women and children in danger from wild animals. One showed a grizzly bear in the home of a woman with her baby in danger.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 2

(Source: Peavy and Smith, *Pioneer Women*, 63.)

The pamphlets gave women the idea that the West was wild and dangerous and the Overland Trail would be incredibly dangerous

---

<sup>12</sup>Peavy and Smith, *Pioneer Women*, 39.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

for them. The women also believed that even after settling, the West would still be dangerous.

Women expected some hardship on the journey, at least based on the paintings they saw. An 1850 wood engraving, for example, portrayed a family on the Oregon-California Trail with their livestock dead.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 3

(Source: Peavy and Smith, *Frontier Women*, 37.)

---

<sup>14</sup>Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith. *Frontier Women*. New York: Barnes and Nobles Books. 1996, 37.

In this engraving, the women looked worried and some were weeping. The journey clearly was harder than the women anticipated. Most women understood that there were going to be dangers and unexpected problems.<sup>15</sup>

What women expected on the journey and what happened were sometimes drastically different. Women did not know how difficult the journey would be. They did not know the many dangers they would encounter on the trail. Many realized within the first few days on the trail, however, that the journey was going to be harder than they anticipated.

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter Five

### SADNESS IN LEAVING HOME

The women looked back one last time to their home fading in the distance. Women said goodbye to their homes and set off on the long journey on the Oregon-California Trail. Often, they were full of sadness. Many women knew that they likely would not return from their journey to the West and they probably would not see their family and friends again. With great sadness, the women said farewell and started on their journey on the Oregon-California Trail to a new life.

In their journals, women often wrote about how sad they were to leave home. The start of many women's journal was a tearful goodbye to dear family and friends. Sallie B. Hester Maddock wrote, "The last good bye has been said - The last glimpse of our home on the hill, and waves of hand at the old Academy, with a good but to kind teachers and schoolmates, and

we are off."<sup>1</sup> She wrote about how her mother was heartbroken to leave her life behind. Another woman, Abigail Jane Scott Duniway wrote,

" with but little difficulty and in a word have had no trouble at all expect what has been occasioned but bidding farewell forever to those with whom most of us have associated all our lives; and to me it was a great trial to leave the home of my childhood, the place where, when care to me , was a stranger."<sup>2</sup>

Sadness about leaving home was normal for women and often portrayed in the paintings about the Oregon-California Trail journey. Historians like John Mack Faragher portrayed women in the West as sad and reluctant to move.<sup>3</sup> He wrote that the main reason women moved was to keep their families together. The women were to help the men with the family and do the cooking. Faragher did not think women enjoyed the West. Faragher may have drawn the conclusion that women were sad from Emmanuel Luetz's image *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* (1864).

---

<sup>1</sup>Diary of Sallie B. Hester Maddock. March 1849, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 1: 1840-1849*; (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 235.

<sup>2</sup>Diary of Abigail Jane Scott Duniway, April 1852, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.*(Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 143.

<sup>3</sup>John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 20.



Figure 4: *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* (1864)

(Source: Goetzmann and Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination*, 116.)

and also from W. H. D. Koerner *Madonna of the Prairie* (1921).



Figure 5: *Madonna of the Prairie* (1921)

(Source: Brianne Peck, *Women as Community Builders: An Examination of Rural Women in the Middle West and Great Plains, 1865 - 1900*. (Lake Forest College, 2003.)  
<http://campus.lakeforest.edu/~ebner/peckbe/images.html>.)

In both paintings the women look sad about the future in the West. In *Westward*, the women are in the background. They are simply along for the journey as helpers to the men.<sup>4</sup> In *Madonna*,

---

<sup>4</sup> William H. Goetzmann and William N. Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination*. (New York : W.W.Norton and Company, 1986.), 116.



the woman looks sad and worried about what her future brings. The painting depicted women as weak. These painting may have been drawn of the women in the early parts of the trip when they were likely sad and scared on the trail.

Other paintings that present women as sad to move West were Richard Redgrave's, *The Emigrant's Last Sight of Home* (1855) and James F. Wilkins', *Leaving the Old Homestead* (1853).<sup>5</sup>



Figure 6: *The Emigrant's Last Sight of Home* (1855)

(Source: Janet Floyd, *Writing the Pioneer Woman*, 71)

---

<sup>5</sup> Janet Floyd, *Writing the Pioneer Woman*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.), 71.



Figure 7: *Leaving the Old Homestead* (1853)

(Source: Janet Floyd, *Writing the Pioneer Woman*, 72)

Both paintings show women crying and sad to leave home. In *Leaving the Old Homestead*, the women are crying and holding hands not wanting to part from their home and start their journey.

Historians used these painting to show women as not wanting to go West but being forced to by their husbands. Another early historian who wrote about women in the West was Lillian Schlissel. She examined how the women wanted to keep the family

together and resisted the move West. Schissel explained that eventually the women moved to keep peace and keep the family together.<sup>6</sup> Not every women wanted to move West and some did have troubles adjusting to the new life. Women who moved West gave up their lives and the comfort of home for an unknown land. The sense of home and self, community, and routine of the women's lives changed when they moved.

Many women had mixed emotions about traveling on the Oregon-California Trail. Polly Coon wrote about everyone in her party being cheerful and in good spirits about the journey. However, she later wrote, "the feelings of sadness ... will creep over one as they leave home and friends for a long time perhaps forever."<sup>7</sup> Each women had her own experience when leaving home. Many knew that the journey would take them far from home and they might never return. The women were nervous, excited, and sometimes extremely sad to leave home.

---

<sup>6</sup>Schlissel, *Women's Diaries*, 30.

<sup>7</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, April 8, 1852, Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5 : 1852; The Orgeon Trail*. 179.

## Chapter Six

### THE JOURNEY

Women looked out from atop of the wagon and saw open land. They were nervous and unsure of what would happen on their journeys to the West. Many times, they looked back one more time to see their beloved family, friends, and home knowing they might not see them again. Their hands shook but they found the courage pushed themselves forward on the journey. From 1845 to 1885, thousands of brave men and women set out for the West on the Oregon-California Trail. They went for many different reasons, but they all packed up their belongings and set out for a new life.

The Oregon-California Trail started in a few different places. The most common place of origin was the town of Independence in Missouri. Other possible starting places were the Council Bluffs area in Iowa or the town of St. Joseph in

Missouri. All travelers followed about the same routes which, somewhat joined together near Fort Kearny in Nebraska, up until Wyoming. At that point, the travelers would follow either the South Pass to go to California or they would continue north to Oregon. (See the maps in Appendix 2 pages 120,121.)

Occasionally, some women started their journey in other towns and states. Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon set off from Lima Rock County in Wisconsin and other women started in the Appalachian Mountain area.<sup>1</sup> Fewer women started from the northeastern states.

Most of the women and their parties were heading for the far West, this mostly referred to California or Oregon. A few traveled to Colorado during the gold rush in the 1860s. Later, after the Homestead Act passed in 1862, more women and their families traveled and claimed land in places like Wyoming and Idaho.

Forts and towns along the trail, provided a rest stop and supplied travelers with goods. However, in the early years, the towns were small and not stocked with many supplies the travelers needed, still the travelers could rest for a bit. As

---

<sup>1</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, March 1852, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.*(Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 177.

time passed, some stayed in the towns along the Oregon-California Trail and sold supplies to the travelers in need.

The prices of the supplies were higher than normal because the travelers desperately needed them and were willing to pay higher prices. For example, Francis Lamar Sawyer wrote in her diary, "Mr. Sawyer wishes to get a mule shod and makes some purchases of a few things that we need. They keep supplies here, but sell at a high price." She and her party stopped just outside of Fort Laramine to stock up on supplies.<sup>2</sup> Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon wrote about the high prices along the trail also. She recalled, "got about half enough poor hay for which the man charged 30 cts per yoke. I record this as a demonstration of the depth of heartlessness to which the human heart is capable of arriving."<sup>3</sup> She knew the suppliers were making the prices higher because they could get travelers to pay more. As time went by, the towns where the travelers started their journeys provided the supplies travelers needed at a reasonable price.

---

<sup>2</sup>Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 12 1852, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 4: 1852 The California Trail*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 96.

<sup>3</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, April 11 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5 : 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 180.

Within the first few days of travel women started to realize the journey were going to be difficult. Polly Coon and her family left in April while it was still chilly in Wisconsin. She wrote, "found that we had truly left all comfort behind at least as far as the weather is concerned."<sup>4</sup> The ground was covered in snow and the cold wind gave many people in her party a cold within the first days of their travels.<sup>5</sup> When her companions became sick, the daily chores became strenuous and they found it hard to keep their spirits high about the long journey still ahead of them.

The weather sometimes caused damage to the wagons. The wagons did not hold together well and became a big problem for the women and their parties. The time and energy required to fix the wagon delayed the journey. Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon wrote about a man in her party having weather related wagon troubles. She wrote, "Dr. S's wagon cover was entirely blown off, & his provisions much wet and damaged."<sup>6</sup> After three days of travel, Lucy Clark Allen wrote, "During the night there came up a thunderstorm. . . . The wagon covers were new and therefore

---

<sup>4</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, April 2 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 178.

<sup>5</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, April 4 1852, Holmes, in *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 178.

<sup>6</sup> Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, June 1852, Holmes, in *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 188.

not properly stretched on the frames [the wagon covers] did not shed the rain very well. It was not long before we were wet through, bedding and all."<sup>7</sup> The wagons, and especially their covers, were not built well enough to with stand the strong winds of the West.

Other wagon troubles occurred within the first few days of travel. Two days after starting the journey, Emily Towell wrote in her journal, "On this day we were struck by a bit of ill luck. John Michael's wagon broke down and had to be taken back to town for repairs."<sup>8</sup> Rachel Miriam Taylor wrote, "Two of our loose horses were hitched behind our wagon, they evidently concluded to go the other way, and commenced pulling backwards. The result of this stratagem was the pulling in two of the wagon cover."<sup>9</sup> Mary Riddle May and her company experienced wagon troubles as well. She wrote in her diary, "I had to take off both our wagon covers and mend them- the horses tore them all to

---

<sup>7</sup>Diary of Lucy Clark Allen, August 2, 1881, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 10: 1875-1883.* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 141.

<sup>8</sup>Dairy of Emily Towell, May 13, 1881, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 10: 1875-1883.* 199.

<sup>9</sup>Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, April 11, 1853, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 6: 1853-1854* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 154.



pieces last night."<sup>10</sup> The wagons often needed to be stronger and better made for the journey.

For instance, wagons often were not made to withstand the strong storms and the rough roads in the West. They also required a lot of upkeep. After a few months on the road, Rachel Mirriam Taylor wrote, "One of our wagons will have to be mended again."<sup>11</sup> Sallie B. Hester Maddock had trouble getting her wagon across the river. She wrote, "here we had a great deal of trouble swimming our cattle across, taking our wagon to pieces."<sup>12</sup> The wagons were made of wood and often each party made their own wagon. Many were not skilled at this craft and each time the wagon broke, the men had to figure out how to fix it. However, some wagons were purchased along the trail and not built by the travelers.<sup>13</sup> Inexperience with crafting wagons was one of the main reason for all the wagon troubles.

---

<sup>10</sup>Diary of Mary Riddle May 12, 1878, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. 10: 1875-1883. 22.

<sup>11</sup>Diary of Rachel Mirriam Taylor, August 5, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 6: 1853-1854. 173.

<sup>12</sup>Diary of Sallie B. Hester Maddock, June 21, 1849, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails*. vol. 1: 1840-1849; (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 238.

<sup>13</sup>No information on how the purchased wagons held together on the trail versus the home built wagons.

Sometimes the wagons could not be fixed. Francis Lamar Sawyer had many troubles with hers and finally gave up and abandoned the wagon. She wrote, "Our road is very rough, rocky, and difficult to travel over... Our carriage broke down, and we had to abandon[sic] it. One wheel got fastened between two rocks and broke all to pieces. We packed everything on the mules." <sup>14</sup> Francis and her party had to find a trading post and purchased another wagon to use for the rest of the trip. They purchased a wagon from someone who constructed wagons and knew how to make them stronger. Wagons often caused delays on the journey, and extra labor and money for the traveling parties.

The wind also caused trouble for women traveling. Lucy Allen Clark wrote about how the women tried to wash but the wind was so strong that it made everything dusty. She recalled, "travelled in the dust...oh so dusty!"<sup>15</sup> The wind made it difficult to travel because of the sand and dust. Polly Coon encountered a big wind storm that blew over many of the tents in her party. Those that did not blow over, the men had to hold down for the night because the gusts were so strong.<sup>16</sup> This

---

<sup>14</sup>Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, August 11 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 113.

<sup>15</sup>Diary of Lucy Allen Clark, August 8, 1881, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 10: 1875-1883.* 82.

<sup>16</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, June 2, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 188.

delayed her party from moving for two days. During this time, they repaired the tents and gathered the items of the camp to clean and dry out.

In addition, the wind made it hard for women to do routine chores like washing and cooking.<sup>17</sup> These tasks had to be performed out in the open, and even with a circle encampment, the wind would blow out the cooking fire. The washing had to be done on a dry and non-windy day so the clothes could be left out to dry without fear that they would blow away or be covered in dust and sand.

The livestock the women took on the journey caused problems. Sometimes the livestock wandered off causing delay. Cecelia Adams wrote about her party's cattle getting lost in the timber.<sup>18</sup> Her party experienced a bit of delay over the cattle wandering off in the night, causing the men to look for them.<sup>19</sup> The women and their companies lost time traveling to locate lost

---

<sup>17</sup>Diary of Lucy Allen Clark, August 15, 1881, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 10: 1875-1883.* 83.

<sup>18</sup>Diary of Cecelia Emily Adams, October 5, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 303.

<sup>19</sup>Diary of Cecelia Emily Adams, October 6, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 304.

livestock and never found some livestock they needed to pull wagons.<sup>20</sup>

The animals often went without food or water on the road, causing them to become sick. Many women commented in their journals about bad drinking water when they did find water. They could not let the animals drink bad water and become ill, because the animals were essential for pulling the travelers supplies. A few women commented on how the animals walked all day and the men could not find suitable food or drinking water and finally gave up to rest for the night.

Animals often went lame on the Oregon-California Trail from lack of food or water on the road. Lucy Allen Ide wrote about how her party had to travel all day sometimes with no food or water for the horses.<sup>21</sup> Lucy then wrote, "Started at 8 this morning our horse very lame and stiff got one from Mr. Gifford to use."<sup>22</sup> The travelers needed the animals to be in good health to carry the supplies and keep traveling at a good pace.

---

<sup>20</sup>Diary of Cecelia Emily Adams, October 8, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 304.

<sup>21</sup>Diary of Lucy Allen Ide, July 21, 1878, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 10: 1875-1883.* 80.

<sup>22</sup>Diary of Lucy Allen Ide, July 15, 1878, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 10: 1875-1883.* 77.

Sometimes, women traded their animals for better stock or left the sick animals behind. Emily Towell experienced a lame horse. She wrote about having to replace it with a better horse before starting the journey again.<sup>23</sup> If the families lost an animal on the road, the other animals strained to pick up the slack. This often led to women and families having to leave behind their wagons. Martha Stone Thompson Read wrote about some her hardships with the animals. In her diary she wrote, "Found no water through the day. One of our horses gave out before night. . . . We had to leave some of our thing in a consequence of our horses giving out and one ox being lame."<sup>24</sup> The animals were essential to the journey because they carried or pulled all the supplies the travelers needed to survive. If the animals gave out the travelers had to make critical decisions about what supplies to leave behind.<sup>25</sup>

Animals often died on the journey. A few days after the lame horse issue, Emily wrote, "There was evidence of a bitter cold winter all around. There were stacks of carcasses all over

---

<sup>23</sup>Diary of Emily Towell, June 6, 1881, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 10: 1875-1883. 205.

<sup>24</sup>Diary of Martha Stone Thompson Read, August 27, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 5: 1852; *The Oregon Trail*. 241.

<sup>25</sup>The oxen pulled the wagons on the trail and the horses were used to carry people and a few supplies. As the animals became weak horses were used in place of the oxen.

the ground."<sup>26</sup> Many women wrote about the number of cattle and horses they saw dead along the journey. Martha wrote, "Saw seven dead cattle on the road."<sup>27</sup> Martha later wrote about how she pitied the animals hard times on the journey. The women did not expect so little food and water to be available for the livestock.<sup>28</sup> The travelers expected enough water and food on the trail for the animals and did not pack enough for the animals. Many animals died because of the elements and because of the lack of clean water and access to food.

Women like Sallie B. Hester Maddock found water to be an issue for the people in her party. She wrote about how water was scarce on the trail.<sup>29</sup> "The water is not fit to drink-slough water- we are obliged to use it, for it's all we have."<sup>30</sup> Sallie was very wary of the water being safe to drink. The lack of water, or unclean water, harmed many travelers, causing

---

<sup>26</sup>Diary of Emily Towell, June 13, 1881, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 10: 1875-1883. 206.

<sup>27</sup>Diary of Martha Stone Thompson Read, August 26, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 5: 1852; *The Oregon Trail*. 240.

<sup>28</sup>Sandra Myers, *Westerning Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*. (University of New Mexico Press), 1982. 22.

<sup>29</sup>Diary of Sallie B. Hester Maddock, August 20, 1849, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 1: 1840-1849. 240.

<sup>30</sup>Diary of Sallie B. Hester Maddock, August 25, 1849, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 1: 1840-1849. 240.

sickness.<sup>31</sup> These illnesses included cholera, dehydration, and diarrhea. At times they led to death.

Sickness was a problem for many people on the trail. Polly Coon's company had many problems with sickness on their journey. She wrote in her diary, "A boy died today in a camp near us of direah [*sic*]." <sup>32</sup> Two days later she wrote, "The disease is all the diareah [*sic*] or Cholera which is almost sure to prove fatal if not checked immediately. Very many of the victims to this disease have no medicine & no preparation for sickness." <sup>33</sup> Many of the people on the Overland Trail did not pack medicine because they did not know there would be a need for it. The people who became ill needed immediate medical attention. The exact cause for the sickness was often unclear. Women were unsure of how to help the sick members of their parties. Catherine Coburn's party experienced bad luck with one of the men. She wrote,

Willie was taken sick with Direah [*sic*] we did not think him dangerous at first but he continued to get worse[.] [W]e traveled along with him a day or two he still continued to get worse until

---

<sup>31</sup>Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 60.

<sup>32</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, June 4, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 189.

<sup>33</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, June 6, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 189.

his deasease [sic] terminated to dropsy of the brain he could not speak . . . before he died.<sup>34</sup>

Some women thought unclean water caused the sickness. Abigail Duniway wrote in her journal advice to her family. She warned, "The great cause of dierrehea [sic] which has proved to be so fatal on the road had been occasioned in most instances by drinking water from holes dug in the river bank and along marshes."<sup>35</sup> She continued, "Be very careful with regard to this [water] especially along this part of the road as the ground is impregnated with alkali;. . . it looks about like ashes and has considerably the same taste only it is a great deal stronger."<sup>36</sup> Abigail wanted to help her family stay healthy on their journey. She let them know the water was most likely the cause of so much sickness along the journey.

Death was also a part of the Oregon-California Trail. Many women lost members of their parties. Most of the women remarked in their journals about how many graves they encountered along the journey. Francis Sawyer wrote, "To-day [sic] we have passed

---

<sup>34</sup>Letter from Catherine Amanda Scott Coburn to James Scott, November 26, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 158.

<sup>35</sup>Diary of Abigail Duniway, June 8, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 62.

<sup>36</sup>Diary of Abigail Jane Scott Duniway, June 8, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 62.



a great many new made graves.... We hear of so much sickness that we are becoming fearful for our own safety." <sup>37</sup> One women wrote that she passed seven hundred and fifty graves on her trip. She remarked about how there were mostly likely more off the main trail.<sup>38</sup> A few women lost family members or their entire family on the Oregon-California Trail. One woman lost her husband on the journey and was left with a baby and no other family.<sup>39</sup> She had to continue with her party, her future uncertain. Francis wrote, " Great must be their sorrow to be thus so cruelly deprived of a dear friend and protector, and left alone in this wild and friendless country," <sup>40</sup> Losing a family member on the trail was difficult, but for a woman to lose the head of a household was devastating. Other parties lost a great number of members. The Donner party lost many of their party members in the mountains. The party started through

---

<sup>37</sup> Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 4, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 94.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Martha Stone Thompson Read to Lorinda Thompson Sheldon, December, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 247.

<sup>39</sup> Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 18, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 97.

<sup>40</sup> Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 18, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 97.

the mountains with fifteen members and made it out of the mountains with seven members.<sup>41</sup>

The women and their parties were not always able bury properly the people who died. It was important to the women and travelers, as Christians, to have a proper burial and trail life did not allow them to slow down their pace to bury family members the desired way.<sup>42</sup> The graves were often shallow and sometimes unmarked. Often, the person was buried without a coffin because the families did not have the materials and the wood needed for a coffin. Mariett Cummings passed by a family burying a woman. She recalled, "The little children were sitting in the wagon, and the husband at the head of the grave, weeping bitterly over the unconfined [*sic*] burial."<sup>43</sup> Religion and family were important to the women on the Overland Trail so having to do without a blessing and a proper grave was difficult for them.

---

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Virginia E. B. Reed, May 16, 1847, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 1: 1840-1849.* 77.; Virginia wrote about how all the families except her family turned to cannibalism in the mountains to survive. She did note that her family ate their dogs.

<sup>42</sup> Andrea Mary Binder, "Deep is the Grave, and Silent: Death and Mourning on the Oregon-California Trails.", M.A Thesis, University of Wyoming, 2011(Proquest).

<sup>43</sup> Diary of Mariett Foster Cummings, June 22, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 144.

Women did not expect the roads to be as bad as they proved to be. Wagons experienced problems handling the bad roads, which delayed the journey. Rachel Taylor had troubles with the roads, "all day we found very poor roads, muddy, sloughy [*sic*], hilly, rough, and everything else bad that could be mentioned"<sup>44</sup> That was not the first time she experienced poor roads. Earlier, in she wrote that the roads were extremely bad on a particular day and her Uncle's wagon had to be pulled out of the mud five times. She and her party were not pleased with the delay the roads caused.<sup>45</sup> Martha Read also had troubles with the roads. She wrote that she and her party found nothing but difficult roads in one part of the country.<sup>46</sup> The roads were tough and often delayed the journey for many parties.

Cold weather also caused problems for women traveling West. Cecelia Adams had difficulty with chores because of the cold weather. She wrote about how she could not get a fire going because it was so cold outside, and much of the firewood and

---

<sup>44</sup>Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, June 11, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 6: 1853-1854. 163.

<sup>45</sup>Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, April 15, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 6: 1853-1854. 154

<sup>46</sup>Diary of Martha Stone Thompson Read, May 2, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 5: 1852; *The Oregon Trail*. 214.

ground was wet and frozen.<sup>47</sup> Mary Riddle May also found the cold weather to be challenging. She wrote, "When we got up this morning we found everything covered in frost - it was very cold. There was ice froze on our water pails."<sup>48</sup> The cold made it difficult to find water that was not frozen and made the daily tasks take longer. The Donner party became buried down in the snow in the mountains and many of the party members died because of the cold and lack of food.<sup>49</sup> The cold also caused health problems like cracked hands, which could become infected. In addition, the cold prompted frostbite and hypothermia. Clearly, the cold made travel and chores difficult and slowed down the time of the journey.

Rain was another difficulty to deal with on the journey. Martha Read recalled, "Weather cloudy in the forenoon, rain in the afternoon, hard thunder showers in the night. Our horses broke away in the night, found them about two miles from camp."<sup>50</sup> The thunderstorms frightened the animals and caused them to

---

<sup>47</sup>Diary of Cecelia Emily Adams, October 2, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 302.

<sup>48</sup>Diary of Mary Riddle May, May 10, 1878, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 10: 1875-1883.* 21.

<sup>49</sup>Letter of Virginia E.B. Reed May 16, 1847, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 1: 1840-1849.* 75.

<sup>50</sup>Diary of Martha Stone Thompson Read, May 6, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 215.

wonder off into the night. The thunderstorms also caused problems with bedding and wagon covers. The rain made the roads muddy and difficult to travel on for a few days.<sup>51</sup> In many ways, rain delayed travel and made the roads dangerous. Francis Sawyer wrote about the heavy thunderstorm producing hail that hit her party. She said, "The stones came down thick and fast, and they were as large as walnuts- none smaller than bullets. The wind blew so hard and furiously that all the animals within our hearing stampeded."<sup>52</sup> The party and the animals were badly beat up by the hail and the stampede caused the party to lose time traveling. They were lucky to recover all the animals. The weather was unpredictable in the West and caused many problems for the women and their traveling parties. Covered wagons did not provide much protection from the wind or hail of the thunderstorms. Often times the thunderstorms arose unexpectedly and trapped the travelers in the open.

High rivers also delayed travel and caused many dangerous situations. Two men in Polly Coon's party drowned while trying to get their cattle across a river.<sup>53</sup> The men lost their lives

---

<sup>51</sup>Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, June 11, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 6: 1853-1854.* 163.

<sup>52</sup>Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 22, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 98.

<sup>53</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, June 30, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 192.

and the party lost time and workers to help them on the journey. Sallie B. Hester Maddock and her companions also found river crossings difficult. Sallie wrote, "Here we had a great deal of trouble swimming our cattle across,. . . A number of accidents happened here."<sup>54</sup> Sallie continued about how a woman and her four children had drowned at the river crossing in the days before.<sup>55</sup> The current was often too strong and high for people to cross, but many took risks to make good time. In addition, there were times when no shallow places to cross the river could be found. For those parties who did wait out the high river, the delay could be a week or more.<sup>56</sup> This cost the parties valuable supplies like food and water.

Ferries and the men operating the ferries were sometimes the only way to cross rivers. The ferries were sometimes just a bunch of logs roped together that could hold one wagon at a time to get across the river. The ferries were not the ideal way to cross.

---

<sup>54</sup>Diary of Sallie B. Hester Maddock, June 21, 1849, in Holmes, Kenneth L. *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 1: 1840-1849.* 238.; The only description on this location is past the Black Hills while trying to cross the Platte River.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, June 6, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 6: 1853-1854.* 162.

Women and their parties found themselves in trouble when they took cut-off routes. Anna Maria King and her party followed a stranger on a cut-off and found that to be an unwise decision. She recounted,

Said he could take us a new route. . . in twenty days, so a large company. . . left the old road to follow the new road and traveled two months over sand, rock, hills, and anything else but good roads. Two thirds. . . ran out of provisions. . . . But worse than all this, sickness and death attended us the rest of the way. . . upwards of fifty died on the new route.<sup>57</sup>

Many times the cut-offs took longer and the women found little water supply. The cut-offs strayed from the rivers, which were critical to the travelers.<sup>58</sup> Sallie B. Hester Maddock's party ended up on a cut-off with no water or wood for fifty-two miles and had to travel at night before finding a place with water to camp.<sup>59</sup> Sallie and her party had to rest two day because the cut-off drained the men and animals of energy-- and some of their provisions.

---

<sup>57</sup>Letter from Anna Maria King to unknown, April 1, 1846, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 1: 1840-1849.* 41-42.

<sup>58</sup>Unruh. *The Plains Across; The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860.* Urbana: (University of Illinois, 1979) 385.

<sup>59</sup>Diary of Sallie B. Hester Maddock, July 4, 1849, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 1: 1840-1849.* 239.

Not all cut-offs delayed the travelers. Francis Sawyer and her party debated on taking a cut-off to make better time. Finally, her party decided to take the McKinney cut-off. She said it gave them an advantage on time and they did not have troubles.

Unexpected accidents caused problems and delay. For example, Francis Sawyer and her party had a wagon run over a little boy traveling with them, breaking the unfortunate boy's legs.<sup>60</sup> This accident delayed travel that day because the wagon needed repair and the boy required medical attention. It also took away a helping hand because the mother needed to watch over the boys while he recovered. Another boy fell and was not as lucky. Lucia Loraine Williams had to bury her young son because he fell from the wagon and his head was run over. Lucia could do nothing to save her son.<sup>61</sup> The journey West was full of unexpected accidents, but the women had to keep moving.<sup>62</sup>

One of the biggest strains on women's daily lives on the trail was their children. Women were responsible for the

---

<sup>60</sup>Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 18, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 97.

<sup>61</sup>Diary of Lucia Loraine Williams, September 16, 1851, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails, vol. 3: 1851.* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.) 132.

<sup>62</sup>Myres, *Westering Women*, 105.



children and keeping them safe. Children became tired and impatient, which annoyed their mothers, who already had too much to do on the journey.<sup>63</sup> Women feared the trouble children could get into on the trail. Children had accidents, and the accidents, some of which could be life threatening. The children could fall from the wagon, be run over by livestock, drown at a river crossing, be bitten by a poisonous animal, wander off and not come back, and other mishaps.<sup>64</sup> Children were a burden on the women. Often the older female children would step in, help with looking after the children, and help with the chores.

Most women tried to avoid pregnancy on the trail. Childbirth was difficult enough for women at home but along the trail, it could be dangerous. Other women were not always available to help with childbirth.<sup>65</sup> There was no time for rest after the birth, and the newborn and mother had to make due in the back of the wagon. Francis Sawyer wrote about a woman she knew giving birth on the trail and her party having to make a camp and wait out the birth. Once the boy was born, the party

---

<sup>63</sup>Myres, *Westerning Women*, 128.; Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 49.

<sup>64</sup>Schlissel, *Women's Diaries*, 128.

<sup>65</sup>Elliot West, "Family Life on the Trail West." *History Today* December (1992), 33.

resumed their journey West. Francis wrote, "I have heard of several children being born on the plains, though it is not a very pleasant place for the little fellows to first meet the light of day."<sup>66</sup> Pregnancy did not stop women from having to do all the chores. It just made the tasks more difficult and burdensome for women.<sup>67</sup> Women often tried to avoid pregnancy because of the complications and hazard it presented on the trail.

One thing that surprised women was their interaction with the Indians. Women thought from what they saw and read that all Indians would be hostile. Some women found the Indians to be pleasant. Often the Indians would trade or help the travelers with navigation.<sup>68</sup> Martha Read recounted in her diary about the Indians they fed and visited. Her party had no issues with that Indian tribe.<sup>69</sup> Rachel Miriam Taylor also found friendly Indians on her journey. She wrote that she and her party visited with

---

<sup>66</sup>Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, August 6, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 112.

<sup>67</sup>Schlissel, *Women's Diaries*, 53.

<sup>68</sup>Unruh. *The Plains Across*, 156.; In this case it was the Paiute Indian tribe who helped the travelers. The travelers named the route after the tribe's chief and it became known as the Truckee River route.

<sup>69</sup>Diary of Martha Stone Thompson Read, May 27, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 219.; However, the party did run into troubles over the next few days. The diary does specify that the problem Indians were from the Pawnee tribe and the friendly Indians were with another unknown tribe.

the Indians and found they were nice.<sup>70</sup> She wrote about how the Indian women showed her their ornamental work and were friendly to her. Some Indians helped travelers in distress.<sup>71</sup> Many women found the Indians eager to trade.<sup>72</sup> Cecelia Emily Adams wrote that she met with Cayuse Indians and, "they are more civilized than any we have seen before[.] Bought a few potatoes from them."<sup>73</sup> Many Indians had supplies to trade with travelers. Some Indians provided crucial information about the flora to the travelers.<sup>74</sup>

However, not all Indian encounters were pleasant. Some women indeed found the Indians to be hostile. Rachel Mills wrote that the Indians rode into their camp and tried to take off with the horses.<sup>75</sup> Nancy Glenn also encountered unfriendly Indians. Her party had horses stolen from their camp. In addition, the Indians killed one man in her party.<sup>76</sup> Nancy said the tribe of

---

<sup>70</sup>Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, July 7, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 6: 1853-1854. 167.

<sup>71</sup>Unruh. *The Plains Across*, 159.

<sup>72</sup>Schlissel, *Women's Diaries*, 122.

<sup>73</sup>Diary of Cecelia Emily Adams, October 8, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 5: 1852; *The Oregon Trail*. 304.

<sup>74</sup>Unruh. *The Plains Across*, 159.

<sup>75</sup>Letter from Rachel Fisher Mills to Unknown, July 2, 1847, Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 1: 1840-1849. 101.

<sup>76</sup>Letter from Nancy Cordelia Beckwith Glenn to Mary A. Beckwith and William Beckwith, October 8, 1862, in Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon*

Indians she dealt with was the Pawnee Indians. Martha Read also wrote that the Pawnee tribe was unfriendly.<sup>77</sup> Later in her journey, Rachel Taylor awoke to find that Indians took off with her party's horses. Luckily, her party met up with a group of soldiers who helped recover the horses.<sup>78</sup>

Travelers encountered problems with Indian parties who were warring with each other. Mariett Cumming and her party found themselves in the middle of two Indian tribes at battle. Her party feared for their safety. She wrote,

"they came singly and in groups, screaming in the most devilish, unearthly style imaginable. We were between the contending parties. As the Pawnees came running their horses by us each one would point at the Sioux and at us, and motion us to stop and join them and whip their enemies. They were very angry that we did not, and we were apprehensive of an attack, but they were too crowdedly."<sup>79</sup>

---

*Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails. vol. 8: 1862-1865.* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.) 21.

<sup>77</sup>Diary of Martha Stone Thompson Read, May 28, 1852, Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail.* 220.

<sup>78</sup> Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, October 13, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 6: 1853-1854.* 181.

<sup>79</sup> Diary of Mariett Foster Cummings, May 26, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 133.

Mariett's party formed a circle encampment to protect themselves from an attack. This was a rare encounter with the Indians. The women and travelers feared this would be their fate on the journey.

The interaction between women and Indians depended on the tribe and the women's travelling parties. Some tribes wanted to trade and interact with overland travelers. While other tribes wanted to harm the travelers who entered the Indian tribe's land.<sup>80</sup>

The interaction between Indians and emigrants also depended on the year of travel and the relationship of the tribe with the United States government. During the time of the Oregon-California Trail, from 1845-1885, many of the Indian tribes were unhappy with their relationship with the government.<sup>81</sup> The United States government made and broke treaties with Indians which resulted in anger and wariness of the emigrants. In some cases, this led to Indians being hostile towards travelers. Many tribes had their land taken away by the government or the tribe had been relocated to new land. This created tension between the overland travelers and the Indians. The Indians were

---

<sup>80</sup>Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith. *Frontier Women*. New York: Barnes and Nobles Books. 1996, 39.

<sup>81</sup> From the 1850s to the 1890s, the United States and the Plains Indians had conflicts resulting in the Sand Creek Massacre, the Colorado Wars, the Dakota War of 1862, and many other conflicts.

protective of their homelands and sometimes saw the emigrants as a threat.

Violence was a cause for concern on the Oregon-California Trail. Polly Coon reported seeing a family, "dead with their throats cut from ear to ear."<sup>82</sup> She was not sure who committed the act of violence. Her party was in shock of such a horrible crime and more cautious in their dealing with other emigrants encountered on the Oregon-California Trail. Francis Sawyer heard from a friend on the trail that a man was murdered, they believed, for his money. The man was known by many to be wealthy. She wrote, "it is thought that his murders are in the company with which he was travelling."<sup>83</sup> Women and their families had to be cautious of fellow travelers as well because crimes like that were not as rare as the women would have wished.

Sometimes the journey had good moments. Every now and then, the emigrants found time to enjoy themselves. Polly Coon wrote about how the men in her party brought along violins and at night would play them to pass the time. She recalled that some of the women upon hearing the music, "could not resist the

---

<sup>82</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, June 29, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 192.

<sup>83</sup>Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 18, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail*. 97.

impulse to "'Trip the light fantastic toe'" over the seared and frozen grass."<sup>84</sup> Other emigrants during their delays found ways to pass the time. Rachel Taylor wrote about a few men playing a joke on the less experienced travelers. The younger men thought they were going to be attacked by some hostile Indians, but it turned out to be an older member of their party. She said, "We came in for a good share of jokes and there is no end to the fun at our expense."<sup>85</sup> The women and men tried to find some humor on the Oregon-California Trail. On days off that, for some reason or another the women and their parties could not travel, they reportedly played ball.<sup>86</sup> Some nights when there were down times the women and men would play music, tell stories, or read to pass the time.

Many of the women found the scenery of the West to be beautiful. Abigail Duniway and Polly Coon both passed Chimney Rock within a week off each other and said it was "breathtaking and romantic."<sup>87</sup> Lucy Ide, traveling many years later,

---

<sup>84</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, April 2 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 178.

<sup>85</sup>Diary of Rachel Miriam Taylor, June 4, 1853, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 6: 1853-1854*. 162.

<sup>86</sup>Diary of Mariett Foster Cummings, April 18, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail*. 121.

<sup>87</sup> Diary of Abigail Duniway Scott, June 14, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 65.; Diary of Polly

also described the West as some of the most beautiful scenery. She said the high mountains and deep gorges suit the most romantic, with beautiful meadows in-between.<sup>88</sup> Paintings of the West showed amazing scenery and the women traveling agreed that the land was beautiful. The land often looked exactly as the women expected.<sup>89</sup>

Men and women had different responsibilities on the Overland Trail. Women performed most of the chores on the trail. These included cooking; cleaning; gathering berries and firewood or buffalo chips; washing; taking care of the sick and the children; unpacking and re-packing the wagon daily; sewing; and repairing the clothing, and the wagon covers. In addition, women were often asked to perform men's work when there were not enough males to help. This included helping get wagons across rivers and out of the mud.<sup>90</sup> Women found daily life to be exhausting. After a few days on the road, Polly Coon wrote, "I find camp life quite fatiguing. There are so many in our family who are unable to work that those who are able are rather over

---

Lavinia Crandall Coon, June 22, 1852, Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 5: 1852; *The Oregon Trail*. 191.

<sup>88</sup>Diary of Lucy Allen Ide, September, 1878, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. vol. 10: 1875-1883. 155.

<sup>89</sup>William H. Goetzmann and William N. Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination*. (New York : W.W.Norton and Company, 1986), 74.

<sup>90</sup>John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 75.



burdened." <sup>91</sup> Women put in extra hours of labor every day on the journey and had little rest for months.

Women often had the most chores and responsibilities along the trail. They would wake before dawn to get breakfast going and would ride all day in the wagon. More often than not, towards the end of the journey, they walked much of the day. At camp, they would prepare the dinner and clean up at night. Women took on these tasks while also looking after their children and other members of their parties. <sup>92</sup>

The hardest chore for women was cooking because they had to change and adapt the chore to accommodate to the trail. They had to learn to cook with an open fire in the dust, wind, and rain.<sup>93</sup> The women also cooked new and different kinds of animals and plants. The women had to figure out if the new items were safe to eat. In addition, the women had to figure out how to make the food appealing for their fellow travelers. Mariett Foster Cummings wrote, "Some of the party caught two fish of a new species but which we did not eat."<sup>94</sup> She decided it was

---

<sup>91</sup>Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, April 6, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 179.

<sup>92</sup>Faragher, *Women and Men of the Overland Trail*, 79.

<sup>93</sup>Myres, *Westerning Women*, 105

<sup>94</sup>Diary of Mariett Foster Cummings, May 20, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail*. 130.

better not to eat the new food, in case it would be harmful. In addition, women found cooking with buffalo chips unnatural, but it made for good fuel.<sup>95</sup> The women searched for firewood or buffalo chips before cooking and in their spare time. They also gathered a good amount of berries and fruits to prepare. Women hoped that adding more fruits into the meals would ward off scurvy and help keep the party member healthy.<sup>96</sup> Once the women adapted to their new situation, they would cook up pies and other delights on special occasions.

At times, the men took over the cooking duties, to give the women some rest. The men complained about back problems from hunching over the fire, and about having to be up earlier and stay up later than the rest of the camp.<sup>97</sup> The men did not enjoy the extra hours of work added to their days. The women worked hard every day while on the journey and put in long hours daily for months while on the Oregon-California Trail.

Some of the women traveling West were young brides or younger women. They were sometimes inexperienced with running a household and all the chores they needed to perform daily.

---

<sup>95</sup>Peavy and Smith, *Pioneer Women*, 31.

<sup>96</sup>Myres, *Westerning Women*, 125.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

Francis Sawyer remarked that a week into the journey it was her birthday and she was twenty-one.<sup>98</sup> Running a household that was a wagon proved difficult. Young women from a rural background adapted more quickly to the Oregon-California Trail chores and daily life. Those from urban, Eastern, and Southern backgrounds struggled in the beginning.<sup>99</sup> One young Southern woman remarked about never having tried to cook a meal before she started on the Oregon-California Trail. She later recalled that she eventually learned how to cook over an open fire, but it was a difficult lesson to learn.<sup>100</sup> Most of the women eventually adapted to the chores and tasks of their daily lives on the trail.

Another difficult chore to which women needed to adapt on the Oregon-California Trail was washing. Women often washed and cleaned all the clothes of the party members. The task was particularly difficult on the journey because much of the equipment commonly used was not packed or had to be abandoned on the road.<sup>101</sup> In order to wash the clothes, women boiled water in pots. Sometimes, they did not have enough pots so the clothes

---

<sup>98</sup>Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 13, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail.* 96.

<sup>99</sup>Myres, *Westerning Women*, 103.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 126.

were soaked and rinsed in the same pot. This meant the clothes were not completely cleaned. In addition, women preferred the water to be soft because they would use less soap and effort to clean the clothes.<sup>102</sup> The boiling water often burned and blistered the women's hands and made other chores difficult.

Women also had to adapt their clothing to the West. Some women wore big hoop skirts at the beginning of their travel. These skirts were not easy to manage for the women. They needed to be able to move easily in and out of the wagon, and to be able to perform their daily tasks.<sup>103</sup> The winds on the plains were difficult to deal with while wearing a hoop skirt. Many women adapted to plain skirts with no hoops. To accommodate the winds, women tried to pin rocks to their skirts in order to keep them down. This proved to be more painful than helpful.<sup>104</sup> Women usually adapted the skirt to be shorter and wore bloomers under them. They called these "Bloomer Dresses" and they provided the same amount of coverage with more ability to move freely. Polly Coon wrote about a trip into a town for supplies where she and other women in her party sparked, "a few remarks from the good

---

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

people of the city by our "Bloomer Dresses".<sup>105</sup> This style of dress was really only worn by the women on the Overland Trail.

The Sabbath was supposed to be a day of rest, but on the Overland Trail, this too had to be altered. Most of the devote Christian travelers in the beginning tried to stop and rest on the Sabbath. However, later in the journey many of the women reported in their journals that their wagon parties were traveling instead of resting. Francis Sawyer wrote, "Sabbath day... distance travelled twenty-two miles."<sup>106</sup> Many of the parties opted for resting a half-day and then travelling, or resting a half-day and doing chores the other part of the day. They had to adapt their religious practices to the West. Women most certainly worked on the Sabbath to clean up camp or their wagons. Most women and their parties conducted some kind of worship on Sabbath days. Many parties took a practical approach and the minister or the person in charge of leading worship would preach while the others in the party continued their

---

<sup>105</sup> Diary of Polly Lavinia Crandall Coon, April 11, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: vol.5: 1852; The Oregon Trail*. 180.

<sup>106</sup> Diary of Francis Lamar Sawyer, June 6, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail*. 94.

work.<sup>107</sup> To take a whole day off for worship was a luxury most people of the Oregon-California Trail could not afford.

Men and women on the trail existed in different spheres, dividing their lives by gender. Women talked almost solely to other women and preformed only their chores unless it was an emergency. This division of spheres made life lonely for women, and they missed their friends and home. Mariette Cummings wrote about missing her friends on the journey and she wished that she could see her friends again because she was longing for company.

<sup>108</sup> While the men sat and talked in camp, women preformed their chores, prepared for the next day's journey, and wrote in their diaries.<sup>109</sup> If women traveled with other women on the journey then they had more of a social life, but they still had a lot of work. Women would normally socialized on wash day because all the women in the area would gather to wash in one place, typically at the river.<sup>110</sup> There actually was little down time for women to relax or to socialize.

---

<sup>107</sup>Myres, *Westerning Women*, 127.

<sup>108</sup>Diary of Mariett Foster Cummings , July 16, 1852, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 4: 1852; The California Trail*. 155.

<sup>109</sup>Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 82.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 78.

After women completed their journey on the Oregon-California Trail, they began to settle in the West. They made their homes and adapted to the new environment. However, it was not an easy transition. Each women had a different experience in settling in the West.

Many women initially continued living out of their wagons or lived out of a tent because there were no homes available.<sup>111</sup> There was a lack of provisions for the new arrivals and they were low on money. Without enough money, they could not build a home. Louisiana Strentzel and her family settled in San Diego in 1849. She and her party had troubles with settling in the West because they arrived in California during the Gold Rush years. She and her party tried to sell their wagons and animals but there was no demand.<sup>112</sup> During the Gold Rush the towns were overflowing with people and the costs of items were expensive. Many more emigrants arrived daily and made it difficult to find descent housing.<sup>113</sup> When the rush settled, California was easier to settle.

Other women had little difficulty when they arrived in the West. Lucia Williams and her party reached Milwaukie, Oregon in

---

<sup>111</sup>Diary of Louisiana Strentzel, December 10, 1849, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women. vol. 1: 1840-1849.* 261.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

1851. The day she arrived in Milwaukee, she had a house to live in and she sold her wagon and other trail supplies for a good sum of money. She also described the soil around her new home as productive and the labor market abundant with jobs. She advised women to move to Oregon Territory because there were plenty of men and jobs.<sup>114</sup> Lucia's experience was ideal and not every women had as easy of a time finding housing and jobs.

For the most part, women did not know what to expect on their journeys. They had some ideas of what might happen. However, they found out that the journey was harder than expected. The journey pushed the women and tested their limits. Most of the women became stronger over the course of their journey.

Women adapted to the Oregon-California Trail and the new lives they created in the West. They worked hard every day on the journey and helped the men on the trail. The story of women on the Oregon-California Trail is important to learn, because women as well as men settled the West.

---

<sup>114</sup> Diary of Lucia Loraine Williams, September 27, 1851, in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*. Vol. 3: 1851. 148.



## Chapter Seven

### THE PROCESS OF MAKING EXHIBITS

Planning an exhibit can take a long time and there are many questions to be answered before getting started. First, decide if the exhibit fits the museum goals and will be beneficial to the museum and the visitors. Then, it is best to figure out if the exhibit can be constructed. Are there enough artifacts for the exhibit? Next, what type of exhibit is best? Should the exhibit be a permanent, temporary, or a traveling exhibit?<sup>1</sup> Another question to ask before getting to work is; should the museum close down during the construction or can it stay open? In addition, a great question is how much time and money is needed for the exhibit? Once these questions have been answered the real work begins.

It is best to form a committee of knowledgeable individuals from the museum and surrounding community to come up with a

---

<sup>1</sup>Armintha Neal, *Exhibits for the Small Museum; A Handbook*. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1976), 9.

realistic plan of action for the exhibit. The committee should decide what type of exhibit fits the museum best. For example, if there is a lot of space set aside and a large collection of artifacts, a permanent exhibit would work for the museum. The planning committee will need to figure out a budget and a realistic deadline for completing the exhibit. The budget set will help determine how large the exhibit is and what materials are needed. This will also help figure out what kind of fundraising may be needed for extra or "back-up" funds, for when things do not go as planned.<sup>2</sup> It is a good idea to plan for some delays and extra funds.

The process of making an exhibit can take months and a plan is required. A helpful way to get started is an outline of the exhibit. (See an example in Appendix 1 page 114.) This can be a basic outline, which includes location, purpose, materials, lighting, labels, and other details. This outline can be converted into an exhibit plan. The exhibit plan is more detailed than the outline. The plan is typically laid out into a three-column list. The first column is the topic of the exhibit. The second column is a list on all the objects that fall under the topic and will be used in the exhibit. (See an

---

<sup>2</sup>Walter L. Crimm, Martha Morris, and L. Carole Wharton, *Planning Successful Museum Building Projects*. (New York: Altamira Press, 2009.), 53.

example of an exhibit plan in Appendix 1 page 116.) This can include objects from the existing collection or objects that can be secured from other collections. The third column includes the exhibit method. For example, what kind of material is needed or what materials will preserve the objects best. Lighting and locations for the objects are included in this column. In addition, the structure of the exhibit is also addressed in the third column.<sup>3</sup> This would include the various thematic sections within the exhibit. For example, if a wagon were included in the exhibit, the material and structure of the wagon would be considered in the plan. Any materials needed to be roped off would also be identified.

The next step is to measure out the space of the exhibit site. It would be a good idea to make a scale model to determine if all the objects will fit in the space and to make the best use of that space.<sup>4</sup> The scale model helps builders visualize the exhibit and move around items and objects to maximize the space usage and establish the best traffic flow.<sup>5</sup> While in the planning process, it is a good idea to figure out what materials are best to preserve each object, that way the objects do not deteriorate

---

<sup>3</sup>Neal, *Exhibits for the Small Museum*, 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

over time. For example, cloth and other textiles should be stored with acid free paper.<sup>6</sup> Also, decide what kind of cases are best. Would built-ins or stand-alones work best? What kind of cases will maximize the space in the exhibit? Each one has their advantages. Built-ins can give more space to the exhibit, whereas the stand-alones allow visitors to see the objects at different angles and to be closer to them.

Next, decide if the exhibit can be built while the museum stays open. It would be beneficial to keep the museum open while the exhibit is being constructed, to bring in money to fund the exhibit. However, there are some draw backs to keeping the museum open. The noise can disturb visitors and workers. Either way, the construction space would need to be contained so the dirt and dust do not get onto any other artifacts.

Once the larger questions are answered, the smaller details like the displays in the exhibit can be planned. There are five factors to remember while planning for the displays:

1. The idea or story to be told;
2. The objects with which to tell the story;
3. The area or space to be devoted to the story;

---

<sup>6</sup>Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute. ([http://www.si.edu/mci/english/learn\\_more/taking\\_care/acidfree.html#](http://www.si.edu/mci/english/learn_more/taking_care/acidfree.html#).) accessed April 10, 2014.

4. The awareness of the audience the display is going to reach; and,
5. The knowledge of the available material to make cases for the displays.<sup>7</sup>

These five factors provide the foundation for a successful display.

The story is essential to the exhibit. What about the artifacts should the visitors understand and why are the artifacts important? Simply throwing together a group of artifacts will not have an impact on the visitor nor will they remember what they saw. The artifacts need to be logically placed in order to tell a story. This can either be done chronologically or thematically with ideas that match.

The objects in the display are also important. Not every possible artifact will be incorporated into the exhibit. The decision on what will be in the display needs to be well thought out because each visitor will spend on average forty seconds to a minute at each display.<sup>8</sup> Too many objects can overwhelm the visitor and too few will not engage the interest of the visitor. Objects need to help in telling the story. Each display needs

---

<sup>7</sup>Arminta Neal, *Help! for the Small Museum: A Handbook of Exhibit Ideas and Methods*. (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Press, 1969.), 21.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 27.

the right artifacts. It is also important to make sure the artifacts will hold up in the display and be preserved. Some artifacts may need to be rotated to make sure they are preserved because the prolonged exposure to light can damage them. Make a list of the objects to go in each display.

The details of how to display every object are next considered. The layout of the display should lead the eye to each object.<sup>9</sup> Symmetrical arrangements of artifacts do not lead the eyes of the visitor, they force the eyes onto a central object and then the eyes wander.<sup>10</sup> Instead, artifacts should be in groupings and put in an asymmetrical arrangement.<sup>11</sup> This helps lead the eyes onto the new objects and reduces eye fatigue. In addition, it is important not to overcrowd the exhibit. Too much can overwhelm the visitor.<sup>12</sup> Another point is not to use bright pops of color. This can also lead to eye fatigue.

Understanding the audience the display is seeking to reach is paramount. People of different age groups and backgrounds go to museums. It is crucial to reach the maximum amount of people.

---

<sup>9</sup>Neal, *Exhibits for the Small Museum*, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Symmetrical arrangements leave the visitors feeling confused because the artifacts did not focus the eyes onto the central focus of the display.

<sup>11</sup>Neal, *Exhibits for the Small Museum*, 81.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 74.

With that in mind, the labels should be at an eighth grade reading level and not overly wordy.<sup>13</sup> Deciding the height of displays can be difficult because young school children and adults all will need to be able to see the exhibit. Humans do not want to move their heads more than thirty degrees forward or forty degrees backwards and forty-five degrees side to side. This range of motion is called the elliptical cone of vision, and should be remembered when planning a display.<sup>14</sup> Having the display at an easily viewed height can cut down on museum fatigue.<sup>15</sup> If the display needs to be large there should be space for the visitor to move back and be able to see the display comfortably.

Another idea to remember about the audience is its short attention span. This means that the visitor will spend only a short amount of time at each display. Accordingly, the exhibit should emphasize only the main, basic, elemental facts.<sup>16</sup> This causes the visitor to grasp the main point of the display in a short amount of time.

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 122.; Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine. *Museum Basics*. (London: Routledge, 1993), 90.

<sup>14</sup>Neal, *Help!*, 34.

<sup>15</sup>There is not right height to a display. As long as the visitor does not have to look outside of thirty degrees up or down the exhibit will not cause too much strain on the visitor.

<sup>16</sup>Neal, *Help!*, 36.

Building material and design techniques also need to be determined when planning a display. The artifacts and objects have to be preserved while on display. Before starting on constructing the exhibit, research should be conducted about what materials preserve artifacts properly. It is important to know what materials should not be used together because they could potentially deteriorate the artifacts. For example, formaldehyde is released by wood and resin binders so objects should not directly rest on wood. Another example is felt and wool should not be used with silver.<sup>17</sup> It would cut down on costs to use materials that are on hand; however that is not always possible.

Lighting should also be considered in this part of the planning. Lighting can give life to objects and set the scenes. Exhibits and storage areas should always be windowless, or at least have windows that can filter UV radiation, because the sun can damage and fade the artifacts.<sup>18</sup> Incorrect lighting can also be harmful to artifacts, causing fading of the materials on display. For example, incandescent lighting gives off heat which can harm the artifacts. However, it works best for displays with

---

<sup>17</sup> Ambrose and Paine. *Museum Basics*, 83.; Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute.  
([http://www.si.edu/mci/english/learn\\_more/taking\\_care/care\\_painting.html](http://www.si.edu/mci/english/learn_more/taking_care/care_painting.html).)  
accessed April 10, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 91.



gems, jewelry, and cut crystals because it provides sparkle to the stones.<sup>19</sup> Fluorescent lighting can be good in the walkways of the museum but it puts off a soft yellow glow that changes the color of art in the exhibit.<sup>20</sup> Fluorescent lighting puts off less heat and shadow than incandescent. LED lighting is the preferred choice of lighting because it provides a natural light with less heat to damage the artifacts.<sup>21</sup> It also creates less shadow in the exhibit. The light bulbs should be at least twelve inches from the front surface of any fabrics, paintings, or color-printed pages, as it may otherwise cause fading of the materials.<sup>22</sup> It is also good to remember that some lighting can become hot and not to put that into a display with delicate artifacts.

The placement of lighting is important. The incorrect placement of lighting can create shadows, which distracts the visitor. Lighting such as fluorescent lighting can also wash out the artifacts.<sup>23</sup> This means that the words may be difficult

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>21</sup>James R. Druzik and Stefan W. Michalski. *Guidelines for Selecting Solid State Lighting for Museums*. Canadian Conservation Institute and the Getty Conservation Institute. (September 2011) 7.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 91.

to read or the colors of the painting are not what it should look like. Lighting can make a critical difference in the way visitors see the displays and exhibits.

Gallery design is another crucial decision. Visitors do not want to walk into a museum and see artifacts on display as if they are just being stored.<sup>24</sup> Museums are increasingly employing more hands on, interactive displays. This keeps the visitor interested and engaged. It is helpful to the visitor if there is a flow to the display or gallery. For example, there is a clear start and finish point, such as featuring the as chronological time period of the display. This can help the visitor understand the story being related.

Labels may seem like a small detail but there are very important to the museum. There are different types of labels in the museum. They are categorized as nonexhibit labels and exhibit labels.<sup>25</sup> The nonexhibit labels identify locations and give directions. The exhibit labels identify the exhibit, artifacts, and give important information about the artifacts. Exhibit labels are further broken down as title labels, subhead labels, introductory labels, group labels, captions, and ID's. Title labels identify the exhibit. The subhead labels give more

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>25</sup>Beverly Serrell, *Making Exhibit Labels: A Step-by-Step Guide*, American Association for State and Local History, 1983. 2.

information about the exhibit. The introductory labels introduce the theme of the exhibit and summarize. The group labels give information about a specific group of artifacts in the exhibit. The captions interpret individual objects in the exhibit. They also explain how the artifacts are important to history. The ID's give the basic facts about the object.<sup>26</sup>

A good rule to remember about all labels is they are there to help the visitor. In addition, it is important to keep the reading level at an eighth grade level, so as to maximize the amount of people who can read them. Most readers prefer short sentences about eighteen to twenty words.<sup>27</sup> Exhibit labels need to be more detailed than what the artifact is or who donated it, but not provide so much information that the visitor does not want to read it.<sup>28</sup> In addition, all labels need to be properly sized, to where the visitor can easily read labels in the museum. Exhibit and nonexhibit labels should not confuse the visitor or be in a font that is difficult to read.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately,

---

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 122.; Ambrose and Paine, *Museum Basics*, 88.

<sup>28</sup>Typically, history museums use labels that give a brief summary of the objects and the significance of the object. Sometimes, this includes who donated the artifact. Art museums normally give the name of the painting and the person who painted it with a brief summary about the painting.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

the museum should be able to explain why history is important, without overwhelming the visitor.

Museum fatigue should be kept in mind while planning the exhibit. This is a type of exhaustion from walking from place to place, stopping, and thinking, then continuing. It can also be caused by standing for a long period of time.<sup>30</sup> On average, men tend to ward off fatigue longest, in part because women tend to be carrying more objects, such as purses.<sup>31</sup> Adults tend to ward off museum fatigue longer than children. When building an exhibit there should be places for visitors to lean or sit. The displays should be at a comfortable viewing height.<sup>32</sup> This means the visitor does not have to look up too high or down too low to read labels or look at artifacts.<sup>33</sup> In addition, there should be some personal space a person can keep while looking at displays. This means, the displays should not be so small that if two strangers were viewing it they would be too close to one

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>32</sup>This means the visitor does not have to look more than thirty degrees up or down to see the artifacts. This varies from person to person so the exhibit builders should keep in mind the average height of men and women.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 34.

another.<sup>34</sup> When constructing an exhibit or a display the visitor should always be kept in mind.

Understanding the basics of how to design an exhibit is important before starting any exhibit. Once the basics are understood, they can be tailored to create any exhibit in any museum. Creating an exhibit requires creativity, hard work, a good idea, and a good plan to bring it into existence. A good idea for an exhibit would be women who traveled on the Oregon-California Trail.

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter Eight

### CONVERTING IT INTO AN EXHIBIT

Women of the Oregon-California Trail are important in the history of the West. They braved the Trail to start a new life in an unknown land. Even though they are often portrayed mostly in a supporting role in the founding of the West, the women were the ones who put in the most hours on the trail. The women struggled through the difficult times of isolation and kept pushing to get to their new home. The women's journals and diaries give the most insight into their experience on the Oregon-California Trail. The women write about what their daily lives on the trail, providing the source material for an exhibit.

Before starting the exhibit for Women on the Oregon-California Trail, there are questions that need to be answered. For example, what kind of museum would this exhibit be in? Where

would this exhibit be? Who would be interested in this exhibit?  
What kind of exhibit would it be?

The Women on the Oregon-California Trail would be best presented in a historical museum or a museum with a mix of historical artifacts and art. This audience would be more receptive to the exhibit. The exhibit could also work in an art museum. However, it would most likely be a temporary exhibit in that setting. Knowing the audience is critical to the success of exhibits and museums.

The exhibit would work in the West or in parts of the country that were impacted by travelers of the Oregon-California Trail. For example, the exhibit would make sense in Missouri, Nebraska, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, and the other states along the Oregon-California Trail. The exhibit would be more effective in those states because the people there can relate to it better. The audience can understand the women's problems with the weather and the landscape because they live in the same areas through which the women traveled.

The audience for the exhibit would most likely be people of the West who have some connection to the Oregon-California Trail and its travelers. However, the audience could also be just the general public, especially those interested in Western history.

It is important to make the exhibit accessible to everyone who wants to learn.

This exhibit could be temporary, traveling, or permanent. It could work as any kind of exhibit depending on the demand and the extent of the exhibit. A temporary exhibit would be good for larger museums that have many artifacts in their collection. The exhibit could be a nice change and show new artifacts. A traveling exhibit would work in Western museums having the space required. The traveling exhibit also allows many visitors to view the artifacts. The Gilcrease Museum featured a traveling exhibit about Women of the West in 2011. A permanent exhibit would be best for Western museums like the Overland Trail Museum in Colorado, smaller museums like Fort Dalles Museum in Oregon, or those museums with a large collection of artifacts to display about women on the Oregon-California Trail. Each type of exhibit has its advantages. Women of the Oregon-California Trail could be constructed into any of the exhibits and function effectively. Ultimately, the exhibit depends on the museum's needs.

The first step to getting started on the exhibit, would be to put together a committee of people who know Western history and understand the audience of the exhibit. Then the committee should form and plan with an outline for the exhibit. They



should look into what artifacts they have and what they will need to borrow.

A good way to show the women of the Oregon-California Trail in an exhibit is through pictures. The photos would be from the later years of the trail.<sup>1</sup> Images show real women on the trail and the lives they led. Displaying historical pictures helps the audience see the real women of the trail. The pictures should include women going about their daily lives on the Oregon-California Trail. This would include depictions of women cooking, cleaning, washing, and other various tasks. The pictures would also give the audience the ability to see how women dressed and what tools and utensils they used. Having real photos of women can make the audience feel more connected to the women on the Oregon-California Trail and more interested in their lives.

Paintings help the audience see the stereotypes of the past and why women sometimes feared the journey West. The paintings often portray women as scared and sad for the journey. Women in the paintings are sometimes crying about leaving home or they are looking off into the distance worried about their

---

<sup>1</sup>The photos would be from the later part of the journey because the dry plate camera was not used until 1855. This was the more easily maneuverable camera. Not many people owned cameras or took them on the trail. The pictures would be staged and probably taken by people on expeditions of the West.

futures. This makes the women look like gentle tamers. Some paintings also show women in the background of the paintings. This makes the women look like they are the helpmates rather than the center characters. The paintings are a good way for the audience to experience the bigger picture of the story of the Oregon-California Trail. The paintings like Wilkin's *Leaving the Old Homestead* and W.H.D. Koerner's *Madonna of the Prairie* and Redgrave's *The Emigrant's Last Sight of Home* are iconic photos of the Oregon-California Trail. The paintings show the how difficult it was for women to leave home and the sadness of the trail. It also shows the excitement of the men for the new journey. The paintings embody the spirit of Manifest Destiny and the harsh realities of the journey for women.

Another way for an audience to experience the women of the Oregon-California Trail would be through their journals. Using the women's own words to help the audience understand what the women felt and thought. Journals could be displayed if there are in good condition. This should only be temporary because the journals should not be exposed to a lot of light for an extended amount of time. Replicas could be used in the exhibit if necessary. The exhibit could also have an audio track with statements from the women's journals. Have women record readings from the journals about the experiences of the Oregon-California

Trail. It could play recollections that fit with a painting, or a picture, or any other object. For example, the audio could play an account about the women's difficulty with washing as the guest is looking at a washing basin and rack. This would help the guest to understand better because they are listening to the women's words and seeing what the women actually experienced.

Another part to the exhibit could be dime novels. Dime novels depicted women on the Oregon-California Trail, although, this would have to be clearly labeled as exaggerated truth or propaganda. The dime novels shaped the way women thought about the Oregon-California Trail and the encounters women might have on their journeys. The dime novels portrayed women as helpless and victims to the Indians and to the land. Some of the images showed women being captured and harmed by Indians. These images could be displayed with statements from the journals that supported the claim or dispelled the claim. The women on the Oregon-California Trail experienced positive encounters with Indians, while others encountered angry Indians. It would be important for the audience to understand that women's experiences with Indians was different with each woman and each interaction.

A good addition to an exhibit would be a covered wagon packed as if the family were about to make the journey on the

trail.<sup>2</sup> This would provide the visitor a better idea of how much the family could take and how much they needed left behind. In addition, it would give the visitor a better understanding that every item brought was absolutely necessary to the survival of the family. The wagon would be a good visual for the visitor, though it would take up a lot of space in the exhibit space. So this idea would really only work for a larger exhibit. The wagon could potentially be expensive and difficult to fund. If the exhibit could take a limited space, then the best substitute would be pictures of the inside of a wagon from the Oregon-California Trail.<sup>3</sup> This could be paired with a supply list from the travelers. Supply lists could be found in newspapers and guidebooks.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, the pictures could be paired with a passage from the women's journals about the difficulty of deciding what to pack and what the family could do without.

The exhibit should also have some artifacts from the women on the Oregon-California Trail. Items that women used on the journey would help the audience visualize what the women went through and how they went about their daily lives. Some good examples would be cooking utensils. This would include pots,

---

<sup>2</sup>Frank McLynn, *Wagons West; The Epic Story of America's Overland Trails*. (New York, New York, Grove Press, 2002.), 110.

<sup>3</sup>McLynn, *Wagons West*. 110.

<sup>4</sup>"Westward Ho!," *New York Times*, February 27, 1857.

pans, knives, coffee pots, and other items. The display could be set up as the women cooking over an open fire, a task that was difficult to adapt to on the journey. In addition, there are multiple journal entries about cooking. Other artifacts that could be included are from the down time on the journey. This could include musical instruments, balls and bats, and reading material. The women did have some time off on the journey and wrote in their journals about the good times they shared with party members.

Other artifacts women used on the Oregon-California Trail would be the washing bucket and rack. This would show the audience how long it would take women to clean all the clothes of the party members. They would also show how much effort went into washing, the pain the rack would cause to the women's hands, and the strain of continually bending over. Another note to include would be how the hot water could blister their hands. This would allow the audiences to see how difficult the women's chores were and how the women did not get much rest on the journey. There are many journal entries about having to do wash all day and how much they disliked this chore. The journal entries about washing could be included in the exhibit.

Other items to include in the exhibit would be the clothing the women wore. This would include the early full-length

dresses and the later "Bloomer Dress" style. This could also include the hoop style dresses a few women wore at the beginning of the journey. These artifacts help the audience understand how difficult the chores were to do with the full length dress and why the women ultimately opted for the "Bloomer Dress". The clothing could be from the time period or it could be made to resemble the fashion from the Oregon-California Trail. However, if the clothing is from the 1800s, it should probably not be displayed for long periods. The audience could get the idea of how bulky and heavy the dresses were in the heat of the summer on the Plains. In addition, the audience could understand why if the dresses got wet women often became sick because the clothing took a long time to dry. The clothing could also include sunbonnets because the women of the Oregon-California Trail were known for the sunbonnets they wore as a protection from the harsh sunlight.

Another item to include in the exhibit would be the guidebooks. This could be a book with letters, newspaper articles, supply lists, and maps of the routes. The guidebooks were important to the journey and the women. They helped women pack for the journey, understand to where they were traveling, and how to survive on the trail. The display could have a guidebook or documents that made up the guidebooks. This would

help the audience understand how much information the women knew about before starting their travels. The guidebooks should be labeled with information about how helpful and harmful they were to women. It should also be explained that and the reason many women wrote the journals was to counter the guidebooks harmful information.

The importance of the exhibit is to help people understand the women and their experiences on the Oregon-California Trail, convey what the women went through in their daily lives on the journey. In addition, an exhibit can help the audience to understand what motivated the women to go West in the first place. The audience should also understand the struggles the women went through while on the journey to the West. The exhibit should break down the stereotypes about women on the Oregon-California Trail and let the audience see that the women were unique and no two stories were the same, while still showing that women did have similar journeys and some shared experiences. It is important not to generalize the women on the Oregon-California Trail and show that each women, in her own way, was a part of a great story in the history of the West.

## References

### Primary Sources

#### Newspaper:

*New York Times*, 1851-1860.

#### Books:

Holmes, Kenneth L. *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails*. 11 vols. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, "Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails"  
<http://solomon.nwld.alexanderstreet.com.argo.library.okstate.edu/cgi-bin/asp/philo/nwld/sourceidx.pl?sortorder=primarysort,secondarysort&xfulltext=yes>.

Morgan, Dale, *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

Powers, Mary Rockwood. *A Woman's Overland Journal to California*. Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1985.

### Secondary Sources:

#### Books:



*Adventures of the Woman Homesteader*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Ambrose, Timothy and Paine, Crspin. *Museum Basics*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Armitage, Susan and Fisher-Dichamp, Christiane and Moynihan, Ruth. *So Much to be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Armitage, Susan and Jameson, Elizabeth. *The Women's West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

Bagley, Will. *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them; Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012

Baker, Terri M. and Henshaw, Connie Oliver. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma; Stories from the WPA Narratives*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007.

Crimm, Walter and Morris, Martha and Wharton, L. Carole. *Planning Successful Museum Building Projects*. New York: AltaMira Press, 2009.

Faragher, John Mack. *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

Floyd, Janet. *Writing the Pioneer Woman*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

Frost, John. *Pioneer Mothers of the West; Daring and Heroic Deeds of American Women*. New York: Arno Press, 1974.

Goetzmann, Willaim H. and Goetzmann, William N. *The West of the Imagination*. New York: W.W.Norton& Company, 1986.

Gordon, Mary McDougall. *Overland to California with the Pioneer Line; The Gold Rush Diary of Bernard J. Reid*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983.

Gray, Dorothy. *Women of the West*. Millbrae, CA; Les Femmes. 1976.

Laegreid, Renee M. and Mathews, Sandra K. *Women of the North American Plains*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2011.

McLynn, Frank. *Wagons West; The Epic Story of American's Overland Trails*. New York: Grove Press, 2002.

Meldahl, Keith Heyer. *Hard Road West; History & Geology Along the Gold Rush Trail*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Myres, Sandra, *Ho for California! Women's Overland Diaries*. San Marino: CA, Huntington Library, 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Westerning Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982.

Neal, Armintha. *Exhibits for the Small Museum; A Handbook*. United States of America: American Association for State and Local History, 1976.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Help! For the Small Museum; A handbook of Exhibit Ideas and Methods*. Boulder, CO: Pruett Press, 1969.

Paltsits, Victor H., *Across the Plains to California in 1852*. New York: New York Public Library Bulletin, 1915.

Peavy, Linda and Smith, Ursula. *Frontier Women*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Pioneer Women: The lives of Women on the Frontier*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996.

Riley, Glenda. *A Place to Grow: Women in the American West*. Harlan Davidson Inc, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains*. University Press of Kansas, 1988.

Schlissel, Lilllian and Gibbens, Byrd and Hampsten Elizabeth. *Far From Home; Families of the Westward Journey*. New York: Schocken Books, 1989.

Schlissel, Lillian. *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*. New York: Schocken Books, 1982.

Schweninger, Lee. *The First We Can Remember; Colorado Pioneer Women Tell Their Stories*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011.

Serrell, Beverly. *Making Exhibit Labels: A Step-by-Step Guide*, American Association for State and Local History, 1983.

Tate, Michael L. *Indians and Emigrants; Encounters on the Overland Trail*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006.

Unruh, John D Jr. *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

### Articles:

Armitage, Sue. "Are We There Yet?" *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, (Autumn 2009). 59-62.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Western Women: Beginning to come into Focus." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 32(1982), 3-9.

Druzik, James R. and Michalski, Stefan W. *Guidelines for Selecting Solid State Lighting for Museums*. Canadian Conservation Institute and the Getty Conservation Institute. September (2011)

Hurtado, Albert. "Settler Women and Frontier Women: The Unsettling Past of Western Women's History." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. (Fall 2001, 22), 1-5.

Jameson, Elizabeth. "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*.7, (Spring, 1984), 1-8.

Jensen, Joan and Miller, Darlis., "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West." *Pacific Historical Review* 49 no. 2 (Spring 1980): 173-213.

Larson, T. "Women's Role in the American West." *The Magazine of Western History* 24 (Summer 1974), 2-11.

Miller, Char. "Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West." *Journal of American History* 87 (December 2000), 1094-1097.

Petrik, Paula. "The Gentletamer in Transition: Women in the Trans-Mississippi West." *Feminist Studies* 11 (Autumn 1985), 677-694.

Schlissel, Lillian. "Women in the West." *American Studies* 23 (Spring 1982), 99-102.

Willams, Jason. "Competing Visions: The Alternate Wests of Wlinore Pruitt Stewart and N.C. Wyeth." *Western American Literature* 44 (Winter 2010), 362-386.

West, Elliot. "Family Life on the Trail West." *History Today* (December 1992), 33.

**Thesis:**

Binder, Andrea Mary. "Deep is the Grave, and Silent: Death and Mourning on the Oregon-California Trails." M.A. Thesis, University of Wyoming, 2011(Proquest).

## Appendix 1

### Storyboard and Exhibit Plan

## Women of the Oregon-California Trail Exhibit Storyboard

### Display 1

- I. Why were women important to the story of the West?
- II. Manifest Destiny
  - a. women's role in the West

### Display 2

- I. Who went West?
  - a. Families
  - b. Single women
- II. Why did women go on the Oregon-California Trail?
  - a. looking for farm land
  - b. moving for their families
  - c. leaving behind debt
  - d. looking for adventure

### Display 3

- I. Stereotypes of women on the Oregon-California Trail
  - a. Gentle Tamers
  - b. Help mates

### Display 4

- I. Where did the Oregon-California Trail start and end?
  - a. Missouri and Iowa
    - i. include a map of the start places
  - b. Oregon and California

- i. include a map of the south pass and the end places

Display 5

- I. The preparation for the Oregon-California Trail
  - a. newspaper articles about the trail
  - b. guidebooks
  - c. journals

Display 6

- I. The journey on the Oregon-California Trail
  - a. chores on the trail
  - b. sickness
  - c. accidents
  - d. weather problems
  - e. water problems
  - f. animal problems
  - g. routes and cut-offs
  - h. landscape
  - i. Indians
  - j. adapting
    - i. clothes, chores, food, and other ways.



<u>Topic</u>	<u>Objects</u>	<u>Exhibit Method</u>
1. Packing for the trip	Newspapers with articles on what to pack.	Panel (casing needed if it is original paper of the newspapers or journals)
A. The tough decisions made while packing.	Journals of family members with advice on what to pack.	Enlarge the journals and articles to show only the part about packing.
i. What was necessary for the trip	Use some artifacts of clothing, pots, pans, and other objects used on the trail.	Wagon packed with objects
ii. Mementos of home		
2. Who went West		
A. Women of all different background traveled West.	Use pictures of the women who went West.	Panel( Put in casing if they are original photos)
i. Midwestern Women		Enlarge the photos of the women
ii. Immigrant Women		
iii. Black Women		
3. Why did women travel West?		
A. Women traveled West for different reasons.	Use pictures of the women in the West working the land or doing chores.	Panel and Casing
i. Land	Use clips from the journals	
ii. Family	describing why the women were going West.	
iii. Gold		
iv. Escaping debt		

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Object</u>	<u>Exhibit Method</u>
4. What trails did they travel on? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i Overland trail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. California</li> <li>b. Oregon</li> <li>c. Cut-offs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Include maps of the different trails taken by women on the Overland Trail.	Excerpts from the guidebooks.  Panel and Casing
5. What were their daily lives? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Chores</li> <li>ii. Travel</li> <li>iii. Weather</li> </ul>	Objects used by women everyday.  Examples: pots and pans.  Journal articles describing travel and weather.	Floor space or on shelving.  Casing could also be good.   Panel or casing
6. What were some of their fears about the West? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Indians</li> <li>ii. Bad Weather</li> <li>iii. Accidents</li> <li>iv. Death/Sickness</li> </ul>	Articles describing the fear of Indian attacks, sickness, pregnancy and death.  Pictures	
7. How was the travel West. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Conditions on the trail</li> </ul>	Excerpts from the women's journals about the travel West.	Panel or Casing

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Object</u>	<u>Exhibit Method</u>
8. Helpful Guidebooks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Were guidebooks helpful?</li> <li>ii. In what ways were they harmful?</li> </ul>	Excerpts from the women's journals about the guidebooks and how helpful they were	Panel or Casing
9. Why did women go West from 1840-1860 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Law for land</li> <li>ii. Panic of 1837.</li> </ul>	Enlarged articles about the laws and women talking about the laws enticing them to go West.	Panel
10. Manifest Destiny <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Propaganda to go West.</li> </ul>	Articles about going West to conquer the land.	Panel
11. Settling in to the West. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Where did the women settle?</li> <li>ii. How did they adapt to the West.</li> </ul>	Pictures of women in the West at their homes.  Articles describing adjusting to living in the West.	Panel

## Appendix 2

Maps of the Oregon-California Trail

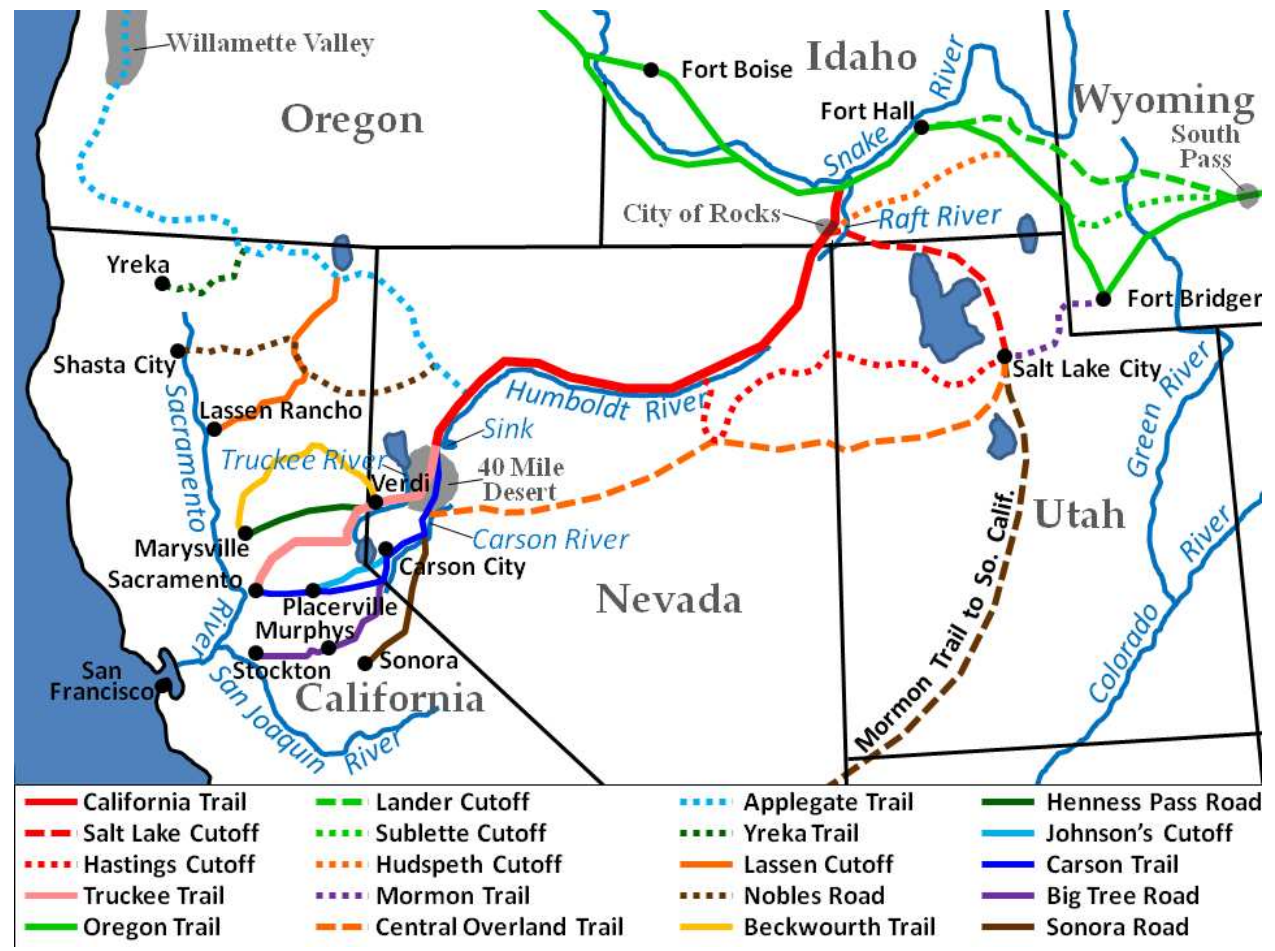
Map 1. Oregon-California Trail - The Oregon Trail



(Source: The Historical Marker Database.

<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=21669>.)

Map 2. Oregon-California Trail Map- The California Trail or South Pass



(Source: Family Search  
[https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/California\\_Trail.](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/California_Trail.))

VITA

Melissa Meyer

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: WHITE WOMEN TRAVELLING ON THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAIL

1845-1885: THE JOURNEY TURNED INTO AN EXHIBIT

Major Field: Public History

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Public History at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2010.

Experience: Internship at Broken Arrow Museum, Summer 2011

Professional Memberships: Phi Alpha Theta