

# The Wagon Tongue

Newsletter of the California Trail Heritage Alliance



Fall 2022

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



### **Kudos for New Trail Center Leadership**

Before I summarize recent work by the California Trail Heritage Alliance, I want to commend the new leadership at the California Trail Interpretive Center. Paul Brownlee the Trail Center Manager and

Thomas Valencia the Supervisory Park Ranger have brought new energy, leadership and effort to their roles. Their work to evaluate and upgrade the exhibits, especially in the Great Basin area, is much appreciated. Outreach in the community and their work to strengthen ties with many partners including Great Basin College is a very positive step. The inclusion of CTHA in 2022 Trail Days and planning for the 2023 event is also a strong signal about the importance they place on partners.

### **Elko Hot Hole**

The work to fence and provide interpretive panels about the history and geology of the Elko Hot Hole is now completed. It provides a great place for tourists and locals alike to learn about this bit of Elko history.

### **MET Mapping**

In late August, under the leadership of Kevin Lee and with the involvement of professional archaeologist Tim Murphy, the last section of the Hastings Cutoff on U.S. Forest Service land in Ruby Valley was in-

vestigated. Unfortunately, the area we inventoried only seemed to have modern trash and there was no evidence of any artifacts associated with the emigrant era. However, the ten people who participated had an opportunity to learn more about trail mapping and to swap stories and Oreo cookies.

### **BLM ARPA Permit**

I have submitted a request to the BLM for an ARPA permit. Once approved by the NV State Office, additional work will be needed to obtain the field work authorization from the Elko District.

### **Interpretive Signage**

Walt Goddard and other board members did a “walk-around” in the main Elko Corridor in the spring. Walt is currently working on photo-shopped images that show potential signs at locations the group thought was desirable. When ready, Walt will share this information with the appropriate city, county and state officials. This will determine when and how we can move forward with additional directional, informational and interpretive signs.

### **Membership Brochure**

Lisa Dinwiddie has recently reviewed the membership brochure and has made some excellent recommendations to improve and update the information in it. Currently new photos are being taken and parts of the text will be re-written. Design and layout will be done by a yet to be determined local business.



## Newsletter

Steve Hrdlicka, GBC Humanities instructor and CTHA board member published his first issue of the *Wagon Tongue* since taking over the editor role. High praise was received from all quarters for the content and quality of this first issue. Steve is also working to build a relationship with the librarians at Great Basin College where the Western Emigrant Trails Collection is housed.

## Bike Path from Elko to the California Trail Center

Larry Hyslop (former CTHA board member) and I met with the new NDOT District Engineer Sammy Yousuf, and staff engineer Rhonda Morfin to discuss past history of the proposed bike path from Elko to the Trail Center. The discussion was productive. NDOT will do some follow-up records review and have some discussions with the Federal Highway Administration. Another meeting will occur in October.

## Gravelly Ford Conservation Easement and Virtual Tour

John Winner, Dave Fullerton (OCTA member), and I have continued work with Nevada Gold Mines on the Conservation easement and Gravelly Ford Virtual

Tour. An initial draft of the easement is currently being reviewed by Nevada Gold Mines and the legal counsel for Nevada Land Trust. After this review, OCTA will have an opportunity to review the document. The same trio (John, Dave and I) have a rough script developed for the virtual tour but are seeking experienced script writers to develop a more polished and complete draft.

## CTHA Website Update

Jordan Thomas has completed the task of updating the CTHA website. Updated information has been provided. Information about the current board of directors and more recent copies of the *Wagon Tongue* have been added. Out of date material has been deleted.

## Native American Tourism Along the California Trail

CTHA is evaluating the possibility of providing funding to support a March 2023 gathering at the Stewart Indian School in Carson City. The purpose of the gathering is to bring Native Americans and others with an interest in tourism related to the California Trail together for discussion and planning activities.

*Helen Hankins*



Trail mappers in Ruby Valley, from left to right, back row: Walt Goddard, Mike Mauser, Dave Sexton, and front row: Marlene Goddard, Helen Hankins, Kevin Lee, Tim Murphy, and Jan Peterson.



## WHAT'S UP... FROM THE TRAIL CENTER



Over the past year, the California Trail Interpretive Center (CTIC) has seen numerous changes and just as many accomplishments! These range from the onboarding of new staff, interpretive exhibit updates,

resuming public programming along with a refresh of the site's program offerings. All these changes have helped us to better tell the history of the California Trail and connect with new audiences.

### **New Team Additions**

It's thanks to the combined efforts of Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Southern Nevada Conservancy (SNC) and Nevada Outdoor School (NOS) staff for a successful year.

We thank site staff such as BLM Park Ranger Gina Mele, SNC Visitor Guide Steve Owens and SNC Operations Manager Paul Gregory for holding down the fort during the pandemic shutdown along with maneuvering the path to CTIC's reopening in 2021. Since October 2021, multiple vacancies have been filled including BLM Park Manager Paul Brownlee, NOS Program Coordinator Nicholas La Palm, BLM Supervisory Park Ranger Thomas Valencia and SNC Visitor Guide Amanda Halsey. A fuller staff has helped to expand our program offerings and site hours of operation for the public.

### **A Return to Public Programming**

As the site increased its staffing, so did our ability to provide public programming and special events. We reached over 1000 students through field trip programs and 1500+ participants in onsite programming! This past year saw the return of Trail Center staple events such as Pioneer Christmas and California Trail Days as well as the resumption of regular interpretation and education programming. To take advantage of the area's dark skies we have begun a monthly night sky program with telescopes to view the dark Great Basin sky. In July, we held our first partnership program with Great Basin College to host a night sky party. CTIC staff also attended Burning Man for the first time in years, al-

lowing us to share the history of the Applegate Trail and its history.

### **An Exhibit Refresh**

Our outdoor and indoor interpretive panels saw a refresh with a late spring installation. This update came due to a combination of panel text errors, faded coloring and a need for general refresh. The plaza now features a sleek new design to fit in with current BLM standards along with new photos. A new set of outdoor panels were also created to help visitors learn the native plants of the site and some of their historical uses. These will be located on the walking trail north of the building next to the native plants they showcase. Summer 2022 also saw the return of the Owyhee Youth Art Exhibit in the South Fork Room, which showcases the work of Owyhee Combined School art students. Many of these works sold according to the student decided prices with all revenue returning to the student artist.

### **Looking Forward!**

As we look forward to the next year the CTIC has many more exciting projects on the horizon. Twenty new indoor exhibit panels are being developed to help discuss crucial subjects including local native history, trail routes into California, the Transcontinental Railroad and the Chinese workers who drove its completion. We've commissioned a new mural project that will feature the contributions of Chinese railroad workers and the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad to help complement the end of the trail exhibit. Our site Junior Ranger book will be redesigned with original drawings to better engage the subjects of the California Trail to a younger audience.

Coupled with these new projects, we'll continue to offer high quality interpretation and education programming! Keep an eye on our Facebook page and website at [californiatrailcenter.org](https://californiatrailcenter.org) for any new updates.

*Thomas Valencia*  
BLM Supervisory Park Ranger  
(Outreach) CTIC  
Phone: 775-778-6081




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## AN ARGUMENT FOR LANGUAGE, LAND, AND SOVEREIGNTY: SARAH WINNEMUCCA'S *LIFE AMONG THE PIUTES*

On March 9, 2005, the State of Nevada presented a bronze statue of Sarah Winnemucca (born Thocmetony in the Numu language) to the National Statuary Hall Collection, which fittingly returned her to the city of American political power. The plaque affixed to the bottom of the statue describes Winnemucca as a "defender of human rights, educator, author of first book by a Native woman." Published in 1883, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* chronicles Winnemucca's life from her childhood in Northern Nevada, her work as a guide and interpreter for the United States government, and her advocacy for Native peoples, their lands, and their ways of living. Yet, despite her statue in the halls of the United States Congress, most Americans, even those living in the American West, are unfamiliar with her importance in history, politics, and literature.

Sarah Winnemucca, whose original name Thocmetony means "shell flower," was born in 1844 along the Humboldt River. She was the daughter of Winnemucca, frequently referred to as Old Winnemucca in historical records, a powerful antelope shaman, and Tuboitony, the daughter of Truckee, the leader of the Kuyuidika-a band. Her childhood was one of fear and upheaval. Yet, through these early trials and the wisdom of her grandfather Truckee, she became one of the most powerful Native women in American history.

Early in Winnemucca's biography, she recounts the first contact between white settlers and the Northern Paiute. Instead of reacting with fear, her people, particularly Truckee, went out to greet them. According to Northern Paiute tradition, the settlers were the children of the Paiute's long-lost brother and sister, who the forefather and mother had separated because "[t]hey were cross to one another and fought." For Truckee, this encounter was a family reunion and an occasion to reconcile. Instead, his "long-lost brother and sister" met him and his people with suspicion. As a result, the relationship between the Northern Paiute, much like it had with other Native tribes, deteriorated into fear and violence.



Living in an arid landscape with few natural resources, the Northern Paiute effectively used the food and water stores available to them. The arrival of wagon trains to California, and the presence of the settlers threatened traditional Northern Paiute lands and their physical means of survival. The settlers' livestock destroyed native grassland: a valuable source of seeds needed for winter stores. In addition, white presence disrupted traditional and ceremonial hunting and fishing activities. The discovery of gold near Virginia City in 1859 and silver a few months later brought California miners across the Sierra Nevadas, causing settlements to spring up



throughout Northern Paiute territory. Furthermore, settlers cleared the land of piñon trees, another primary food source. The little water available was seized for livestock or diverted to feed mills.

Despite the disappointment of this initial encounter, Truckee understood that his people and settlers would need to find a way to coexist in peace. To better understand those crossing to California, he took Winnemucca and other family members to work for Jacob Bonsall and Hiram Scott. The two men ran a ferry across the San Joaquin River and owned an inn for travelers making their way to San Francisco from the gold mines in the Sierra Nevadas. This early experience prepared Winnemucca to attend school in San Jose in 1860. During these formative years, Winnemucca learned to speak, read, and write fluently in English and Spanish. Winnemucca's literacy became a source of power and influence that she employed to benefit her people and give them a voice.

With the devastation of their traditional homelands, the Northern Paiute faced the threat of starvation. Instead of hunting and harvesting, Winnemucca and her people had to negotiate an economy that required precious metals, or another form of currency, to acquire goods. In the fall of 1864, twenty years before Buffalo Bill's Wild West Exhibition, Winnemucca became a "show Indian." Because she could speak English fluently, her father enlisted her to translate the speeches he made in the halls and streets of Virginia City. Although these speeches, which outlined the "wrongs and claims" of the Northern Paiute, had limited success, Winnemucca and her family received enough response that they decided to present a theatrical performance at the Metropolitan Theater on October 22, 1864 in San Francisco, titled "Romantic Entertainment." The San Francisco press roundly panned the exhibition but did praise the sweetness of Winnemucca's voice. Undoubtedly, these early "oral" performances showed Winnemucca the power of her voice and how she could use it for the benefit of her people.

Winnemucca began working as an interpreter for the United States military at Fort McDermitt in 1869, developing a trust and respect for the military that she would hold until her death. During her work at Fort McDermitt, Winnemucca sent a letter to Maj. Henry Douglas, the superintendent of Indian Affairs for Ne-

vada, providing information on the deplorable condition of her people and the poor treatment they had received from the Indian agents at the Pyramid Lake Reservation. Douglas was so impressed with the letter that he forwarded it to the commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington. Winnemucca's letter was eventually published in *Harper's* and reprinted in Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* (1881)—an attempt to do for Native Americans what Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) did for enslaved Africans.





In 1882, after the US military dismissed her from their service, Winnemucca began a letter-writing and speaking campaign to present the state of the Northern Paiute. Her speaking engagements took her to Philadelphia, Providence, Hartford, and New York City. In Washington D.C., she met Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz and President Rutherford B. Hayes, who promised intervention on her people's behalf. In Boston, she met her future financial backer, Elizabeth Peabody, and her editor, Mary Peabody Mann. She lectured in the homes of Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Greenleaf Whittier. Throughout her lecture tour, Winnemucca realized that she could present more information and reach a larger audience if she were to write her story and the story of her people.

Winnemucca's autobiography, the first book by a Native woman, made it to print because of the financial and editorial assistance of the Peabody sisters. The two sisters championed Winnemucca's writing as they saw its value in pushing ordinary Americans towards political action on behalf of indigenous peoples. By publishing Winnemucca's account of her people's history, encounters with white settlers, and details of the abusive reservation system, Mann and Peabody hoped to elicit sympathy for an oppressed group and outrage at American Indian policy. Unfortunately, Winnemucca's work did not have the impact that the Peabody sisters had hoped. The United States and its citizens continued to violate treaties, seize Native lands, and remove Native children from their families. Despite the limited success after its publication and its obscurity today, the autobiography conveys the profound mistreatment of the Northern Paiute and an indictment of the abuse of Native peoples:

*Dear reader, I must tell a little more about my poor people, and what we suffer at the hands of our white brothers. Since the war of 1860 there have been one hundred and three (103) of my people murdered, and our reservations taken from us; and yet we, who are called blood-seeking savages, are keeping our promises to the government. Oh, my dear good Christian people, how long are you going to stand by and see us suffer at your hands? Oh, dear friends, you are wrong when you say it will take two or three generations to civilize my people. No! I say it will not take*

*that long if you will only take interest in teaching us; and, on the other hand, we shall never be civilized in the way you wish us to be if you keep on sending us such agents as have been sent to us year after year, who do nothing but fill their pockets, and the pockets of their wives and sisters, who are always put in as teachers, and paid from fifty to sixty dollars per month, and yet they do not teach. (Winnemucca 86)*

Winnemucca used the meagre proceeds from the sales of her book to establish the Peabody Institute in Lovelock, Nevada. The Peabody Institute was created as an alternative to the Indian boarding school system, which devastated tribal communities. Hoping to remedy this, Winnemucca taught Northern Paiute children in both their native and English languages until the school lost funding in 1889. Winnemucca died on October 17, 1891.

*The New York Times* published the notice of her death on page one, calling her "a remarkable woman." The power of Winnemucca's words had reached and influenced many audiences.

*Gregory Wright*

*Gregory Wright is an associate professor of English & Philosophy at Snow College in Ephraim, UT. He specializes in the literature of the American West and Native American literature. He is currently working on a project that examines the work of American novelist Frank Norris through the lens of Aldo Leopold's land ethic.*

### Sources

#### Autobiography

Winnemucca, Sarah. *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and their Claims*. Edited by Mrs. Horace Mann. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883. Available at Archive.org [here](#).

#### Biography

Zanjani, Sally. *Sarah Winnemucca*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.



## FEAR AND COASTING ON THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL



Oscar Wilde’s assertion that “what seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise” has always entered my mind when I have been riding for long distances or found myself surmounting obstacles that sucked in the moment. In the military, we would say “embrace the suck.” It is with those prevailing thoughts that I found myself traveling across the country during a global pandemic to arrive at a town dead center in northern Nevada after living for decades in and around larger towns along the Texas/Mexico border.

When I arrived in Elko in the fall of 2020, I was excited to explore the space I was going to call home in the most meaningful way I knew -- by bicycle. I remember the perfect weather for autumn, warm, sunny, and dry. I was quickly introduced to the one issue with that goal: the lack of available pathways and infrastructure. I rode many miles in all four cardinal directions and found that the one thing that was lacking to get to anything of historical interest was a safe space to ride.



The introduction and construction of a new hike and bike trail between Elko and the California Trail Interpretive Center was recently brought up to me by Steve Hrdlicka in a discussion. I was so stoked; I went home and told my family about it because I

wanted them to have the same experiences I had riding – without all the fear and trepidation that I had on my rides to the center. The only current way to travel between Elko and the CTIC is I-80. It is legal but riders find themselves navigating the debris field of traffic on I-80 heading westward toward Carlin



Stretch of W. Idaho St. on the way to the Trail Center with no shoulder. This road ends at I-80 exit 303.

with little more than the emergency lane as their safe space. Cars, trucks, motorcycles, RVs, and semis regularly careen by at 90+ MPH. Even the opportunity to discuss bike travel with the state law enforcement has resulted in looks of shock and dismay at the idea of riding the highway, legal or not, because it is seen as dangerous.

My son, Zeby, and I routinely ride the on and off-road routes we can find in the region. Looking through past issues of the *Wagon Tongue*, I have found that breaking ground for this bike path has been a long-fought endeavor. Establishing a hike and bike path to the California Trail Interpretive Center would benefit community health and well being as well as open financial avenues of tourism in a region that currently feels isolated for this cyclist.

*Dean Straight*



# UPCOMING EVENTS

- November 10 - Board Meeting
- December 17 - Pioneer Christmas!  
10AM-2PM
- January 12 - Board Meeting
- February 9 - Board Meeting

## KEY LINKS

[www.facebook.com/pages/California-Trail-Center-Foundation/157116030992463](http://www.facebook.com/pages/California-Trail-Center-Foundation/157116030992463)

<http://www.californiatrailcenter.org/>

[www.emigranttrailswest.org](http://www.emigranttrailswest.org)

[www.octa-trails.org](http://www.octa-trails.org)

[www.appl.org](http://www.appl.org)

[www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/elko\\_field\\_office/blm\\_programs/blm\\_special\\_areas/](http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/elko_field_office/blm_programs/blm_special_areas/)

### California Trail Interpretative Center Hours:

Beginning Oct. 3rd, the Center will be open Wednesday through Sunday, from 9-5PM.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Years Day.

Please call (775) 738-1849 for more information.

## CTHA Board of Directors

### Core Members:

- Lisa Dinwiddie
- Marlene Goddard
- Walt Goddard
- Helen Hankins
- Steven Hrdlicka
- Kevin Lee
- Gratton Miller
- Gene Romanski
- David Sexton

### At-Large Members

- Kathryn Ataman
- Paul Dinwiddie
- Jacqueline Lucero
- Brad McMullen

- Larry Schmidt
- Jordan Thomas
- Frank Tortorich
- John Winner

### Newsletter

Editor:

- Steven Hrdlicka
- Contributors:
- Thomas Valencia
- Helen Hankins
- Gregory Wright
- Dave Sexton
- Dean Straight
- Kim Hrdlicka





## MAPPING EMIGRANT TRAILS IN RUBY VALLEY: AUGUST 21, 2022

As the early morning temperature started to rise, a half dozen anxious volunteers met trip leader Kevin Lee and archeologist Tim Murphy at the intersection of Harrison Pass and Ruby Valley Roads. Getting his maps out, Kevin explained that our US Forest Service permit would be expiring shortly and today we needed to determine if a scar near the county road was associated with emigrant travel.

Our clue was from the Heinrich Lienhard (one of the infamous "Five German Boys") journal entry of 1846, "On September 4 our way led past the above-mentioned rocky projection around to a southwesterly direction..."

Kevin did not have a lot of hope of finding items emigrant related but if we didn't complete an in-field evaluation/metal detecting he said he will always second guess what the scar may have been from. The area that previous trail mappers had explored is east about a quarter of a mile from this site.

Under our permit much of the Hastings Cutoff trail in Ruby Valley had been sought and found. Teams in 2019 had metal detected and "identified, measured, photographed, described, and documented large numbers of square cut nails, washers, and bolts" which, according to the Fall 2019 *Wagon Tongue*, "Tim conjectured were clearly following a wagon trail."

The hunt was successful in that it fulfilled Kevin's expectation of finding nothing, except for several bags of modern roadside litter. Several hunters expressed surprise, as earlier trips had been so bountiful, and this was the first time we got skunked. We retired to a side road where Kevin broke out and launched his drone, showing off and explaining how well it worked and the opportunities of spotting things and places from the sky not apparent from the ground. Some of us then hiked into the brush to search out the remains of an early farmer's homestead before lunch, and a return home.

*Dave Sexton*



Dave Sexton detecting along the trail



Mike Mauser with a bag of captured roadside litter

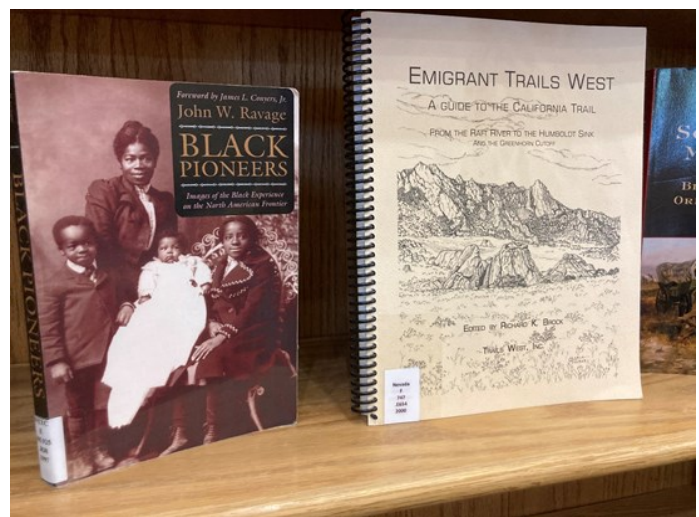


## GREAT BASIN COLLEGE LIBRARY AND THE WESTERN EMIGRANT TRAILS COLLECTION

The Western Emigrant Trails Collection (WETC), now curated by Great Basin College Library, represents a real treasure for those who seek to learn about the California Trail. The collection belongs to the Elko District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and is property of the California Trail Center. Back in 2019, the California Trail Center moved the collection to GBC based upon a formal Memorandum of Understanding made between the above parties. Then, as interim Director and librarian Eric Walsh said, “Covid happened.”

Although still a wonderful resource in its current form, at this point the WETC exists in an in-between state. According to David Stirm who oversees the cataloging of materials for the GBC Library, the Trail Center has transferred less than half of the collection to GBC (a little over 400 out of some 900 volumes). David has catalogued the 400 plus volumes that have been transferred, and thus all of these

ed adjacent to the Circulation Desk on the first floor of the library. The Nevada Collection is also nearby, and likewise houses numerous books on or related to California Trail history. Taken together, the three collections are diverse and provide opportunities for both casual enjoyment and scholarly research.



Books from the WETC and Nevada Collection



volumes may circulate (be checked out), and may be searched remotely through GBC’s online catalog. Though this is certainly nice, making a visit to the library to physically browse the WETC is great fun! Ideally positioned next to the Native American Collection, these two collections are conveniently locat-

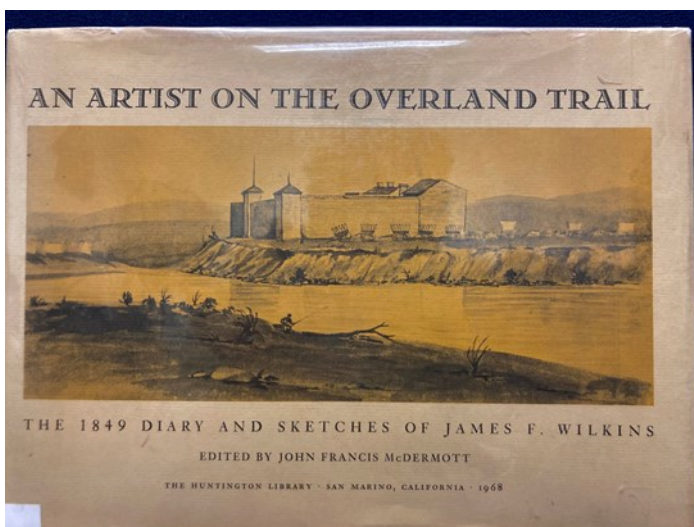
Unfortunately, most locals do not know about the Western Emigrant Trails Collection at Great Basin College Library. The collection has not received much use to date. In fact, I am certain that even many of my colleagues at GBC are still relatively unaware of the collection. One reason for this is because the formal reception for the WETC (initially planned to coincide with the OCTA Convention in Elko back in 2021) was cancelled. I am happy to report that GBC is supportive of organizing an event to showcase this valuable collection (more details to follow).

As I sought to learn more about the collection, Eric Walsh provided me with copies of the Memorandum of Understanding between the BLM and GBC as well as other background. He also explained that the BLM holds numerous rare books and manuscript diaries, though GBC does not have the appropriate re-



A sampling of books from the Nevada Collection, the American Indian Collection, and the WETC

sources to curate rare “special collections” type materials. UNR’s special collections would be a good fit for these manuscript diaries. Digitizing these rare collections to make them available electronically at the college would likely draw researchers to GBC as well. Speaking to drawing people to GBC’s collections, David Stirm underscored the idea that the WETC does not circulate through interlibrary loan. The collection was moved to GBC from the Trail Center in order to make it more available to folks in



The above book collects sketches and diary entries made by artist James F. Wilkins. The sketch on the cover was made on June 24, 1849, and is of Fort Laramie (no. 18)

and around Elko as well as to draw visitors to GBC. The flip side to this is that if the collection does not receive adequate usage it may need to be relocated yet again. Please don’t let this happen—go check out a book from the WETC soon!

## REVIEWS

*An Artist on the Overland Trail: The 1849 Diary and Sketches of James F. Wilkins*

and

*George R. Stuart’s Classic, The California Trail: An Epic with Many Heroes*

I hope to highlight particularly interesting books in future issues in order to draw more attention to the WETC and the GBC Library’s resources in general. The book pictured here, *The 1849 Diary and Sketches of James F. Wilkins* (Pasadena: Huntington Library, 1969) combines diary entries with sketches the artist made of notable stops along the California Trail. Apparently Wilkins was not after gold in 1849, but had dreams of creating a “moving panorama,” a new innovation in the mid 19th century. As McDermott states in the introduction to the book, “artists had been painting gigantic canvases to entertain and instruct large audiences. Many were travelogues picturing distant scenes and famous localities which appealed as much to the armchair voyager as to the viewer who had been there in person...[One could] visit Jerusalem and the Holy Land, wander on Broadway among the theaters and the stage stars...see Niagara Falls, enjoy a boat trip down the Hudson,” among experiencing many other locations and voyages (3).

Wilkins hoped to create a “Moving Mirror of the Overland Trail,” as he “contemplated what delight it would be to penetrate into the fastness of the rocky mountains to revel in their sublime scenery, and draw forth their hidden beauties and publish them to the world, the more so as no professional artist had ever had the courage to undertake a journey fraught with so much privation difficulties and dangers” (4).

To my mind this increases the curiosity of this book immensely. Not only does it feature numerous interesting sketches and diary entries of an actual Over-



land Trail journey, but these were made with the aim of creating one of the most ambitious art pieces in history. Unfortunately the panorama did not survive (I hear that the canvas was probably around 400 yards long and nine feet high!) but the sketches and diary did.

The sketches themselves have a curious provenance, as McDermott details scrupulously in the editorial apparatus (pp. 20-24). I found this to be most fascinating, but I won't bore readers with the details here. Obvious to anyone at a glance, the sketches are clearly the work of an accomplished artist—the nearest thing to photographs of major landmarks like Soda Springs, Chimney Rock, Fort Laramie, Independence Rock, and Devil's Gate. The diary entries are interesting because they are dated and Wilkins “was on the spot at the right dates,” as McDermott observes, so we see what the emigrants would have seen (23). For example, Wilkins reached Independence Rock on July 10:

*Passed that noted rock called Independence Rock, from some very early Emigrants passing the 4th of July there. it is a solid dome of granite rising out of the prairie, with thousands of names, painted principally with tar. Five miles further on we came to the Devils Gate. this is a great curiosity, being a gap in the mountains, for the passage of the sweet water*



No. 30, Independence Rock, July 10, 1849



No. 31, Devils Gate, July 10, 1849

*river, thro which it leaps and boils with fury. the sides of the gap are so perpendicular as to leave no room even for a foot passenger to pass. they are very high (near 300 ft) and rugid. I regret I could not pass two or three hours here to finish the sketch of it more highly. grass here is a little more plentiful but still scarce. to day we left the river for about 7 miles up a long steep and sandy bluff. the roads are so sandy, that it is very severe on the cattle and wagons both. the dry atmosphere and hot sand causes them to shrink in spite of all our precautions. passed one loaded wagon with the tires off two wheels. Dead oxen lay on the road to day nearly every hundred yards. The nauseous effluvia arising from so much putrid flesh, was offensive in the extreme. Two of our boys went out hunting early in the morn<sup>g</sup> and did not return till midnight, nearly dead with fatigue, bringing one buffalo tongue. the hind quarters of an antelope they carried till within a mile or two of camp. They reported having killed two buffalo an elk and an antelope, and having walked between 40 and 50 miles over the mountains. we observed signal fires light up on the tops of the high bluffs in different quarters. wether this is done by Indians or not cannot say. (McDermott 53-54)*



Perhaps the most moving image to me was this one of a lone tree.



No. 14, Lone Tree and Indian Burial, June 18, 1849

When I first encountered the image above I was arrested by sublime feelings. I felt that whatever this was, to me it evoked strong emotion, silence, and eternity. Then I found the diary entry for June 19:

*Passed yesterday an Indian's 'grave' if a corpse lying on the top of a tree can be called a grave. On the top of a solitary tree, by the banks of the Platte, was a bed of poles on which lay the corps of an Indian. He was wrapped in a Scarlet Blanket and a Buffalo Robe. (McDermott 45)*

As can be seen from the diary passages above, and the sketches pictured here, the experience of reading this book is unique, not to mention entertaining and educational. I have thoroughly enjoyed spending time with this book not only for the diary and sketches, but also for the editorial material, which is excellent. McDermott does a fine job to include lots of relevant accurate contextual detail which adds significantly to the immersive experience of this curious book. Wilkins's sketches and diary entries can be found on the shelves of the Western Emigrant Trails Collection at Great Basin College.

### *The California Trail: An Epic with Many Heroes* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962)

When I first spoke with Helen Hankins about possibly taking on editorial duties for the *Wagon Tongue*, the first book she recommended I read was this classic by George R. Stewart. The GBC library holds two copies of this "epic" book; one copy resides in the library's general collection and the other copy can be found in the Nevada Collection. Stewart is a great storyteller, and that's not to say that he was an academic lightweight; he was professor at Berkeley and received his PhD from Columbia in 1922. He vividly relates the stories of the first attempts emigrants made (in particular the Bidwell and Chiles party stories are excellent). The book is much too light on the Donner Party story, however, but there are lots of other more detailed books on that.

I only have enough space to make just a couple of quick points about the book here. The first concerns the subtitle, "an epic with many heroes." Stewart opens the book with this idea, and one of the ways he develops it is by discussing the dynamics of the emigrant wagon parties, what he calls "frontier democracy": "Every man was as good as his neighbor, and insisted upon his final right to the decision. He asked no backing from his government or from a big company. Here was free enterprise in a degree which has now become only a dream. At the same time, these people recognized the necessity of cooperation. In their own way and on their own terms they were willing to organize, to submit to the will of the majority, to work for a common good. This mingling of individualism and cooperation was flexible..." (11). Kim touches on an aspect of this "frontier democracy" in her review of *In Pursuit of a Dream*. The students in the film come from many different backgrounds but learn to cooperate with each other in order to advance on the Oregon-California Trail.

The other point I find important to make, perhaps because it is somewhat obscure, is about Father Pierre Jean De Smet (a.k.a. Black Robe). De Smet is a huge figure in emigrant trail history, and my piece next issue will focus on this Catholic Priest. It was this figure who first showed the emigrants the way west, through, as Stewart puts it, "a stroke of luck" (12).

*Steven Hrdlicka*



## FILM REVIEW: *IN PURSUIT OF A DREAM* (2009)

*In Pursuit of a Dream* (2009) documents the journey twenty-four modern-day teenagers took as they travelled a significant portion of the Oregon-California Trail back in 2008. Three guides/teachers, David Vixie, Kim Merchant, Janet Wragge, led the participants along the trail and to a rare appreciation of the struggles faced by the emigrants. Arielle, one of the students in the film, remarked at one point, “If you erase the trail, you erase history.” Like the emigrants, the students came from many different parts of the country, each carrying along their own distinct background, and point of view on life. Yet by facing hardships together as a unit, the teenagers realize they must work alongside each other if they hope to reach a common goal.

The historical value of this film is unique. The interpretive experience juxtaposes numerous quotations from actual journals written by emigrants against the backdrop of the similar experiences the students face in real time. The diary entries quoted in the film were often written by emigrants between the ages of 9 and 15, adding a particular relevance.

The journey begins outside of Casper, Wyoming. A landscape of rolling hills, sagebrush as far as the eye can see, and a vast, open sky meets the teenagers unexpectedly. The students are asked to change into period clothing, and also to hand over their precious cell phones and other electronic devices. This is one of the most amusing scenes of the film. One student says, “I’m supposed to call my parents once a day. Everyday to check in. There’s no service.”

Vixie simply responds, “Yea?”

The lead guide Vixie then provides instructions for how the covered wagons must be loaded. Everyone must consider what to load onto the wagon for the journey, but everyone also needs to agree to leave precious things behind: “The things that you bring will affect how we go down this trail,” Vixie says. He continues, “The better choices you make, the more control you’ll have over your life in the future.” This example shows how the interpretive experience often points beyond itself toward a general life lesson.



Once the students reach Independence Rock, the first major landmark on the trail, they begin to set up camp and to cook dinner. A storm is brewing. As clouds gather, the winds pick up and lightning strikes in the distance. Time is of the essence! Amidst the mutual struggles to set up camp in the wind, a student named Kennedy reflects upon the importance of





Independence Rock, saying that the emigrants, “had to make it here by the Fourth of July, otherwise they wouldn’t make it to Oregon in time before the winter set in.” The wagon party’s arrival on July 3<sup>rd</sup> matches the emigrants’ usual arrival date to this same landmark. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration at Independence Rock is one of the real highlights of the movie. Viewers can see the joy on everyone’s campfire lit face as traditional swing dancing accompanied by a guitar and fiddle cap off a festive evening.

At one point in the film, the team faces the difficult fact that some of the members are to head west to California, and the rest will continue into Oregon. The original emigrants faced this same difficult reality. To document this crucial point on the trail, the film shares a journal entry Lucy Ann Henderson wrote at the age of 11 in 1846:

*You have no idea the confusion and uncertainty of the minds of the emigrants as which was the best route to take. Some said you had to buy land in California, while Oregon, it was free. Others said Oregon had the best climate, but it was much easier to go to California.*

The wagon party encounters numerous people along the trail. Some are mappers who seek to expand the map of the original United States of America. They meet a lone traveler on his way to California in search of gold. The party also meets Shoshone Native Americans, and this provides for the needed opportunity to converse and trade. A diary quote accompanies this segment of the film. It is written by a 15-year-old named Andrew Jenson in 1866:

*About 100 Indians were encamped here. And after we had subdued our fear and timidity, they became*

*the object of our greatest attention and curiosity, as they were a friendly band, a number of them soon appeared in our camp.*

The film then turns to focus upon how the Shoshone honor the wagon party with a powwow. This segment of the film provides a glimpse into the Shoshone and the sacred lands which have been central to their lives over the past 3,000 years.

Overall, I enjoyed the film and believe that it would be an excellent educational resource for teachers or anyone interested in learning more about the Oregon-California Trail. Though it has been out for some time, the film is still generally lesser known. It is brilliantly shot throughout with vivid color and lots of well-chosen scenes. The characters are memorable, as are the challenges they face. The soundtrack of traditional country/bluegrass/folk music adds to the atmosphere of the viewing experience. I bought my copy of the film in the gift shop of the California Trail Interpretive Center located just outside of Elko, NV a couple of months ago. It is also available for purchase through the OCTA website (<https://octa-trails.org/product/in-pursuit-of-a-dream-dvd/>).

*Wagon Tongue* readers and OCTA members likely remember the similar (though much shorter) journey led by David Vixie which took place near Elko last year. Thirty or so students were led down the infamous “Hastings Cutoff” trail—a journey of about 64 miles. You can read more about that experience in last fall’s (2021) issue of *Wagon Tongue*.

*Kim Hrdlicka*

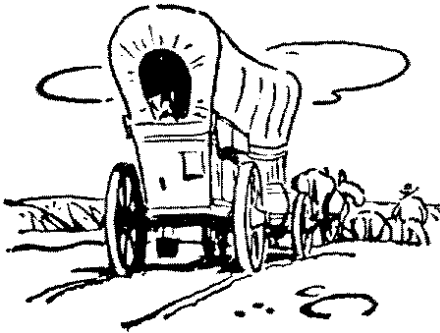




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