

THE WAGON TONGUE

Newsletter of the California Trail Heritage Alliance



Art explores Nevada legacy of labor

End of the trail mural at California Trail Interpretive Center unveiled

By Thomas Valencia, CTIC Park Ranger

As visitors make their way through to the end of the emigrant exhibits at the California Trail Interpretive Center (CTIC), they'll witness a new mural depicting Chinese laborers constructing a railroad through a Northern Nevada landscape. The mural was completed by Hattas Studios, a Los Angeles based organization led by Jeanine Hattas.

Previously, this end section of the exhibits at the CTIC lacked a satisfying conclusion to the story of the California Trail. The era of emigrants travelling along the California Trail ran from 1841-1869, with its "death" resulting from the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad.

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Photo by Kim Hrdlicka



Photo by Kim Hrdlicka

Members of the community come together during the 2022 Pioneer Christmas event held at the California Trail Interpretive Center.

What's inside

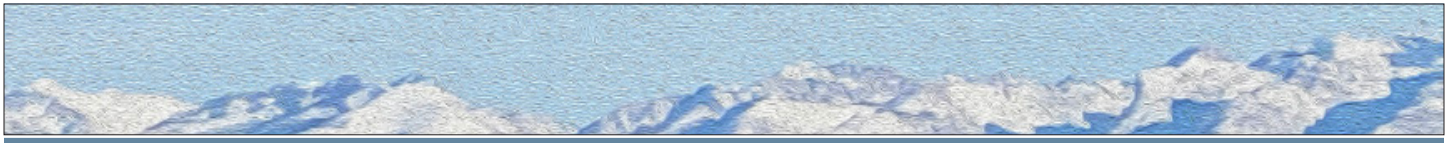
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Upcoming events

- Feb. 9 Board meeting
- Feb. 16 Multiuse Trail update
- March 9 Board meeting
- April 13 Board meeting

CTHA Board Meetings

*At this time, California Trail Heritage Alliance board meetings will begin at 5:30 p.m.



MURAL continued from Page 1

Sharing the struggle and perseverance of Chinese workers gives greater context to the monumental task of completing the Transcontinental Railroad. The mural will provide a strong visual background to the soon to be completed panels that will share information on the workers, the difficulties of work, prejudices faced, and their resulting legacy.

Plans for a Transcontinental Railroad solidified with the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, “an Act to aid in the construction of a railroad and telegraph line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean...”. When construction on the western portion of the railroad began, the Central Pacific Railroad immediately found difficulty in maintaining a full workforce due to difficult terrain and strenuous nature of the work. Though anti-Chinese sentiment ran high in the nation, they turned to recruiting Chinese laborers out of desperation. Chinese workers not only helped to shore up the workforce, but also served as leverage to keep white worker complaints and threats of striking at bay.

It was through toil, sweat and blood that the western portion of the Transcontinental Railroad was completed. Chinese workers endured discrimination and labored through some of the most difficult sections of terrain including the imposing Sierra Nevada mountains.

Workers were considered expendable, many dying from accidental explosions or frequent snow or rock avalanches. As many as 1,000

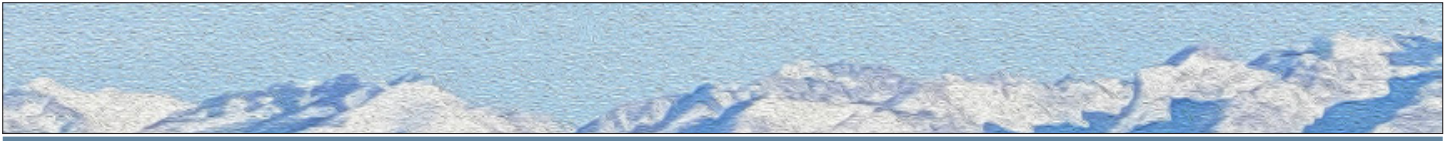


Photos by Kim Hrdlicka

workers are believed to have died over the course of construction. Although they completed the most strenuous work in miserable conditions, compensation wasn't equal. At the end of a long day, Chinese workers were required to sleep in outdoor tents while white workers slept in train cars. They were paid only one-half to two-thirds pay compared to their white counterparts, but worked longer hours

and were required to pay for their own food.

Whether it be chipping through solid granite or carrying away rock, Chinese laborers performed high-quality work and were trusted to complete a job regardless of difficulty. The work ranged from unskilled tasks like moving earth to skilled work such as masonry, blacksmithing and carpentry.



Photos by Kim Hrdlicka



They cleared roadbed, laid track, handled explosives, bored tunnels, and constructed retaining walls with the use of only hand tools. The Chinese regularly performed above expectations. One of the most notable feats was when workers laid ten miles of railroad track in a single day. 5,000 mostly Chinese laborers worked between 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. to lay down over 4.4 million pounds of track. An U.S. Army officer who witnessed the work stated, "It was just like an army marching over the ground and leaving the track behind them."

With their efforts, the Chinese workers helped lay down the future of the United States. The state of transportation changed forever, opening a previously difficult path to the West, and paving the way for the United States to move forward as a nation.





Pioneer Christmas 2022

‘Most successful’ Pioneer Christmas event in CTIC history

By Steven Hrdlicka

Dressed in interpretive emigrant garb, Helen Hankins warmly greeted visitors to the California Trail Center right at the door. She noted that the recent event was “the most successful Pioneer Christmas in history,” and also that Amanda Halsey (Southern Nevada Conservancy) did a wonderful job of organizing it. Hundreds of people attended the non-commercial gathering and this certainly demonstrates the value of the Trail Center for the community of folks who live in and around Elko.

Visitors caught folky renditions of Christmas tunes such as “The First Noel,” “Angels We Have Heard on High,” and “Joy to the World” performed by two members of the local band Southwind. Beautiful guitar and violin melodies circulated throughout the entry way of the Trail Center while many sipped hot chocolate or cider in the lobby and enjoyed the company of family and friends. Others walked through the galleries and visited booths set up for the event. In addition to being able to visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus, interpretive staff and volunteers assisted children in making crafts such as reindeer (out of candy canes and pipe cleaners), Christmas cards, yarn angels, and gingerbread houses.



Photos by Kim Hrdlicka





Pioneer Christmas 2022





From the President

Looking ahead for California Trail Heritage Alliance in 2023

More than 180 years ago, some intrepid pioneers in Missouri were beginning to think about heading West – even though there were no maps, roads, or after a certain point, knowledgeable guides. As the New Year begins, we also are thinking of what lies ahead for the California Trail Heritage Alliance. Fortunately, we have hopes, dreams, and especially definite plans for some of the work we want to accomplish in the coming year:



Helen Hankins,
President

- Complete work on the Virtual Tour for Gravelly Ford Celebrate finalization of the Gravelly Ford Conservation Easement
- MET map in the Goshute Valley
- Build partnerships to make the bike path to the Trail Center a reality
- Expand interpretive and informational signage about trail history in the Elko Corridor
- Update the membership brochure
- Enhance the website www.ctha-nv.org
- Continue publication of Wagon Tongue
- Strengthen marketing efforts for CTIC
- Support Trail Days, Pioneer Christmas and other events at CTIC
- Promote Trail Preservation education efforts in the community

Isn't this a great blueprint for getting more wonderful things done for our community, the CTIC, and future generations? It will be a great year and a great opportunity to invite friends along to learn about the California Trail, the Hastings Cutoff, and the Greenhorn Cutoff! Hope to see you on the Trail.

Calendar of Events

Building a multi-use trail to the California Trail Center

Help put together ideas and suggestions about a proposed walker/biker/multi-use trail. Join others on February 16, 6-8 pm, at the Southwest Gas Building, 2901 Ruby Vista Dr, Elko. The intent of the project is to create an outstanding opportunity for public recreation along the historic California Trail.

Pre-Covid, several organizations were engaged in positive discussions about this potential multi-use path from the City of Elko to the California Trail Interpretive Center. The Elko County Commission approved the Elko County Bicycle Plan in May 2016.

Recently, the California Trail Heritage Alliance and others re-initiated discussions with the Nevada Department of Transportation about this project. Interested participants are needed to help study the feasibility of the project, develop a potential route for the path, and many other items.

Interstate 80 follows the general route of the California National Historic Trail. A walker/biker trail in this location would lend itself to interpretation of this amazing westward migration and those who made this trek.

For more information contact helenhankins@gmail.com or hyslop.nv@gmail.com

Hibernation versus Migration: Should I stay or should I go?

Come join Americorps Mikayla of the Nevada Department of Wildlife for a presentation on some of Nevada's amazing wildlife on Saturday, February 18, 2023 from 1-2 p.m. at the California Trail Interpretive Center (CTIC). Learn about different Nevada animals that hibernate or migrate! All ages are welcome.

Knife and axe throwing

Join us for an afternoon of knife and axe throwing on Sunday, February 19, 2023 from 1-2 p.m. at the California Trail Interpretive Center. The program is outdoors, so please dress accordingly for the weather and make sure to stay hydrated. In order to better serve our visitors we ask that you now register for events. Register at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SXX7K7Q>.

Green and mean: Winter in the high desert

Join us as we learn about the plants, animals, and people uniquely adapted to survive and thrive in the harsh high-desert environment of northern Nevada on Saturday, February 25, 2023 from 1-2 p.m. at the California Trail Interpretive Center. There will be a landscape painting activity following the presentation.



Voices of Western Women: Wonders of Western Landscape

By Jennifer Stieger

For centuries womanhood has often been defined by traditional normative roles connected with the home and domesticity. The women settlers who traversed the California Trail in the 1840s embodied those roles; they were mothers, wives, daughters, sisters. Yet these women braved the trail as equals alongside the men, hoping, yearning, for the untold wonders of the West. In Volume 1 of *Covered*

Wagon Women, edited by Kenneth L. Holmes, the firsthand accounts of women settlers reveal the myriad roles they assumed on the journey west. Reading through these diaries and letters al-

lows readers to hear women settlers' voices, and often these voices appear to transcend traditional female roles through word choice, imagery, style, tone, and metaphor. Indeed, the beauty of the diaries and letters in *Covered Wagon Women* is that the artifacts are revised as little as possible to remain true to each writer's original intent. Words are misspelled; punctuation is missing. Often, the reader must use their imagination to interpret the writer's meaning, lured by simple, unadorned descriptions of towering rocks, windswept plains, and

In addition to managing the finances, women settlers also identified as botanists of the early frontier.



Photo: <https://www.sierrasun.com/news/donner-party-heroine-saw-tragedy-before-going-west/>

No portraits of Tamsen Donner are known to exist, according to her descendants. Tamsen's daughter Francis (pictured here) strongly resembled her mother.

barren deserts.

This essay explores some details in the writings of three women; diarist Elizabeth Dixon Smith describes geological formations in the Midwest, employing language that is simple yet expressive. Patty Sessions, a midwife who traveled West with the Mormon overland party, writes succinctly about her daily duties, which often include repairing wagons, preparing meals, birthing babies—and killing rattlesnakes. Tamsen E. Don-

ner's writings detail her central role in family finances as well as her interest in botany.

Tamsen E. Donner traveled west with the infamous Donner-Reed party in 1846. Unfortunately, Donner did not survive the arduous journey, dying shortly after her husband in the frozen Sierra Nevada (Holmes 68). Yet her written words linger like rippling waves of grass across the prairies. Two letters written by Donner are included in *Covered Wagon Women*. The letter dated June 16, 1846 “near the junction of the North and South Platte” is addressed to a friend and describes life along the Platte River (Holmes 70). At this point, the journey appears placid even though Donner—with uncanny foreshadowing—acknowledges that the preparation of food stores “might have been bettered” (70). Donner specifies that they “laid in 150 lbs. of flour and 75 lbs. of meat” (70). These numeric details show how frontier women often assumed financial roles traditionally held by men during that time. In fact, women were keenly aware of economics and household finances. Anne M. Butler supports this claim in an introduction to *Covered Wagon Women*. Butler argues that Western women “did not expect to be marginal voices in the management of family finances” (6). With children to feed and thousands of miles of rough terrain to cross, women settlers recorded economic details

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pertinent to survival.

In addition to managing the finances, women settlers also identified as botanists of the early frontier. Along the Trail, they recorded minute details about flora and fauna. Donner uses vivid word choice and simile to describe the flowers along the Platte. In describing the midwestern landscape, Donner writes that she discovers “a beautiful flower resembling the bloom

Volumes 1-4 of *Covered Wagon Women*, edited by Holmes, can be found at Great Basin College Library in the WETC.

of the beach tree, but in bunches as big as a small sugar-leaf, and of every variety of shade to red and green” (72). Her words are evocative and poetic, painting colorful lush strokes in the reader’s mind. This is the Promised Land women settlers believed was worth sacrificing their lives for their families. In the next sentence Donner writes, “I botanize...” (72). She clearly identifies as a botanist and understands the significance of her work at this moment in time.

Patty Sessions was a midwife who traveled West with the Mormon overland party to Salt Lake City, Utah. Many of the diary entries record everyday details such as how many miles were traveled, or how many buffalo were killed for food. In 1847 Sessions writes, “some men went out hunting this afternoon killed 4 bufaloe” (170). Here, the reader ob-



Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

Patty Bartlett Sessions

serves the writer’s misspelled words and lack of punctuation. However, Sessions’s rhetorical choices are significant because they tell her story firsthand as no one else can do. In the introduction to *Covered Wagon Women*, Holmes explains why the entries were edited as little as possible for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization: “It tells something important about her and about the society in which she lived and moved and had her being” (16). Sessions’s words depict a woman who is pragmatic and efficient, focused and single-mindedly driven. At the end of the diary, Sessions writes, “I have drove my wagon all the way but part of the two last mts....I broke nothing nor turned over” (184). Her sparse, bare words convey pride in her strength and autonomy. In one entry Sessions writes,



Photo: Archive.org

Eliza P. Donner, daughter of Tamsen Eustis Donner

“camp on the river find good feed kill a ratle snake” (p. 175). Survival—all in a day’s work.

With a style that echoes Donner’s, Sessions also delights the reader with poetic devices such as imagery and metaphor. For example, in one entry Sessions describes “red majestic rocks” in Weber Canyon (183). In an earlier entry she reports that the cattle circle “round and round like a whirlpool” (173). Despite the fact that everyday tasks take precedence, Sessions records the beauty and wonder of the natural Western landscape. Like Donner, her words blow away dust and obscurity, showing firsthand how women settlers experienced life on the frontier.

Elizabeth Dixon Smith was a

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Conservation easement discussions moving forward

By John Winner

I have been involved with this project for the past nine years, but as the old saying goes, “There may be light at the end of the tunnel.” It all started as an application submitted by Newmont Mining Corporation, now Nevada Gold Mines (NGM), to BLM for an open pit mine in northeast Nevada on what is mostly public land administered by BLM. What has evolved? We are close to a signed Conservation Easement between NGM and Nevada Land Trust. This Conservation Easement would preserve some of the pristine trail segments on the California National Historic Trail at Gravelly Ford on Land owned by NGM. Gravelly Ford is roughly 100 miles west of the Long Canyon Project.

In 2013, the Oregon California Trails Association (OCTA) received notification of the mine project and its proximity to the Hastings Cutoff. A major cultural resource, the Hastings Cutoff is an emigrant trail that branches off from the main California National Historic Trail. From the material provided, I plotted the boundaries of the project and the general location of the Hastings Cutoff (see figure 1). The Hastings Cutoff alignment was within the project boundary, which meant that OCTA would have consulting party status as to the impact to the trail.

There are typically two types of impacts, simply put, (1) Direct Effects, physical damage or alteration to the



Map by John Winner

A map, identified as figure 1, identifying the general area identified as the location of the Hastings Cutoff and the proposed project boundary.

trail or site, and (2) Indirect Effects, a change to the viewshed or visual effect. It should be noted, that while we had a general idea of the location of the Hastings Cutoff, it had not been mapped to OCTA’s MET standards. i.e., confirmed location, trail classification and documentation.

Since The Hastings Cutoff had not been officially mapped, the BLM did a field survey and could find no surface evidence to determine the actual location of the Hastings Cutoff. Therefore, it was concluded that there would be no Direct Effects, only Indirect Effects. In the course of discussions, the BLM sought mitigation items that would be considered to offset or mitigate the impact from the indirect effects of the open pit mine. On December 12,

2016 I submitted (on behalf of OCTA) a list of mitigation items including the following: Create Conservation Easements or similar protective provisions for emigrant trails on Newmont properties and subsidiary properties; Allow controlled access to emigrant trails and historic sites.

Newmont had been acquiring property in Nevada for some time, including the Horseshoe Ranch, now the Elko Land and Livestock Company (ELCo). Gravelly Ford, an emigrant camping area and crossing of the Humboldt River is on the ranch and some very pristine trail segments on the California Trail are located on ranch property including the “Unknown Emigrant Graves” site at Gravelly Ford. In 1989 members of OCTA fenced and placed an interpretive sign at the Unknown Emigrant Graves site. Trails West has a Rail Marker at the site.

In a letter dated April 30, 2018, Newmont responded to the proposed Indirect Effects Mitigation for the Long Canyon Mine, Gravelly Ford Conservation Easement. ELCo, the owner and manager of the land at the Gravelly Ford site, part of the Horseshoe Ranch, will establish the Gravelly Ford Conservation Area: An area 100 meters in radius around the Gravelly Ford Unknown Emigrants Graves site; An area approximately 100 meters in width, 50 meters on either side of trail centerline.

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Photo taken from Ch. 15 of Nunis, entitled, "Historical Notes by Father Nicholas Point."

Passage of a muddy ravine (sometime in May, date unknown). Sketch by Father Point S.J.

De Smet: California Trail History, Native American Relations

By Steven Hrdlicka

Father Peter John De Smet was a Jesuit priest and missionary known among several Native American tribes simply as "Black Robe." Despite being a major figure in the nineteenth-century American West, few in Nevada may be aware of the significance of Father De Smet in California Trail history, or of his missionary activity among Native American tribes such as the Coeur d'Alenes, the Flatheads, the Kalispels, the Blackfeet, and the Kutenais. This essay sketches out Father De Smet's time with the Bidwell-Bartelson Party as well as his tireless efforts to avert what he foresaw to be a tragedy for Indian buffalo culture due to the pragmatism of U.S. western expansion.

Will Bagley prominently features Fa-

ther De Smet in his book, *So Rugged and Mountainous* (2010). Although he notes that Father De Smet "is not without his critics," Bagley often quotes directly from De Smet's diaries, includes him in much of his narrative of the California Trail, and describes his service to Indian tribes (83). Readers first meet Father De Smet when Bagley tells the story of the Drips party, the first emigrant train to Oregon:

"A black-robed Catholic missionary joined Drip's train. Pierre-Jean De Smet had immigrated to the United States from Belgium in 1821, and two years later he became one of the founders of the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus [Jesuits]. He had worked with American Indians ever since, establishing Saint Joseph's Mission to the Pottawatomie tribe at

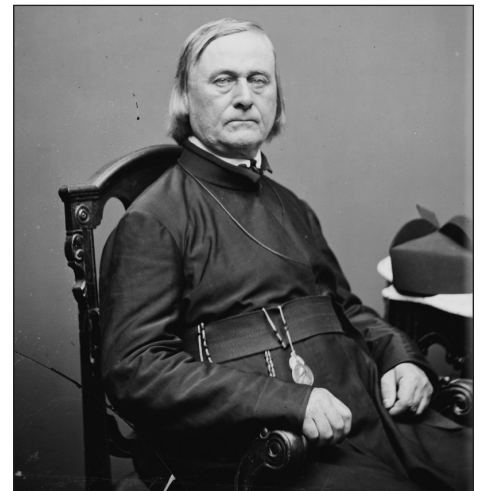
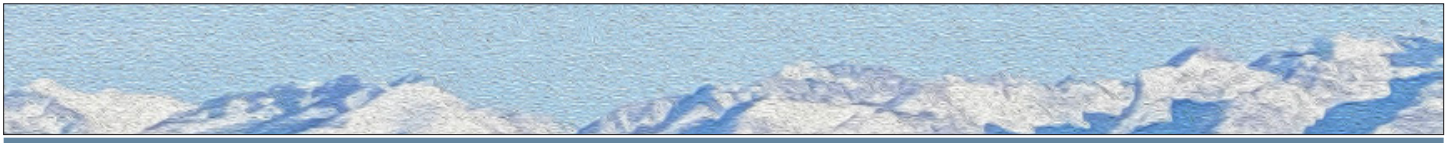


Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

Father Peter John De Smet.

Council Bluffs in 1838: he served them well by arranging a peace with the Yankton Sioux during the summer of 1839. The next spring

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In some areas there are multiple “trail swales” and in these cases the boundary of the conservation area will be measured from the “outermost trail-related swale.” ELLCo will establish a land encumbrance, conservation easement, or similar legal instrument to protect the Gravelly Ford Conservation Area from direct adverse impact.



Photos by John Winner

What happened next... In July 2019, Newmont Mining Corporation and Barrick Gold Corporation entered into a Joint Venture forming a new company, Nevada Gold Mines (NGM). October 28th, 2019 in a meeting with BLM, the consulting parties, including OCTA and The California Trail Heritage Alliance (CTHA) were informed that BLM no longer intends to seek any mitigation for indirect effects resulting from the Long Canyon Mine project. Furthermore, the Department of Interior, issued Instruction Memorandum IM 2019-018, stating in part, while the BLM will consider voluntary proposals for compensatory mitigation, the BLM is prohibited from requiring offsite compensatory mitigation. It's quite obvious that Gravelly Ford is offsite, 100 miles west

and not within the project boundary nor the Area of Potential Effect of the Long Canyon Mine Project.

Next step...With the BLM stepping back, OCTA along with the CTHA entered into direct discussions with NGM regarding a conservation easement at Gravelly Ford. NGM was familiar with Newmont's proposal and were favorable to continue the process.

Enter Nevada Land Trust (NLT). When creating a conservation easement, the land owner conveys a portion of their ownership rights, typically to a nonprofit organization. In this case development rights to the property. NLT is a nonprofit conservation land trust, working to protect key land, water, wildlife, recreation, historic, scenic and agricultural resources in Nevada.

The Conservation Easement: Grantor, NGM the land owner will grant and convey to the Grantee, NLT, its successors and assigns a perpetual easement for conservation, for the purpose of conserving and forever maintaining the natural, scenic, historical and open-space character of the Property as well as preserving the availability of the Property for agricultural use. The emigrant trail and sites will be preserved and the cattle ranch will continue.

Virtual Tour: Another feature stemming from the mitigation at the Long Canyon Mine Project was to create a virtual tour of Gravelly Ford from Interstate 80 to the Humboldt River. This amounts to roughly 7 miles of emigrant trails on both public and private land from I-80 to the Humboldt River.

Newmont had been acquiring property in Nevada for some time, including the Horseshoe Ranch, now the Elko Land and Livestock Company. Gravelly Ford, an emigrant camping area and crossing of the Humboldt River is on the ranch and some rail segments on the California Trail are located on ranch property including the 'Unknown Emigrant Graves' site at Gravelly Ford. In 1989 members of OCTA fenced and placed an interpretive sign at the 'Unknown Emigrant Graves' site. Trails West has a Rail Marker at the site.

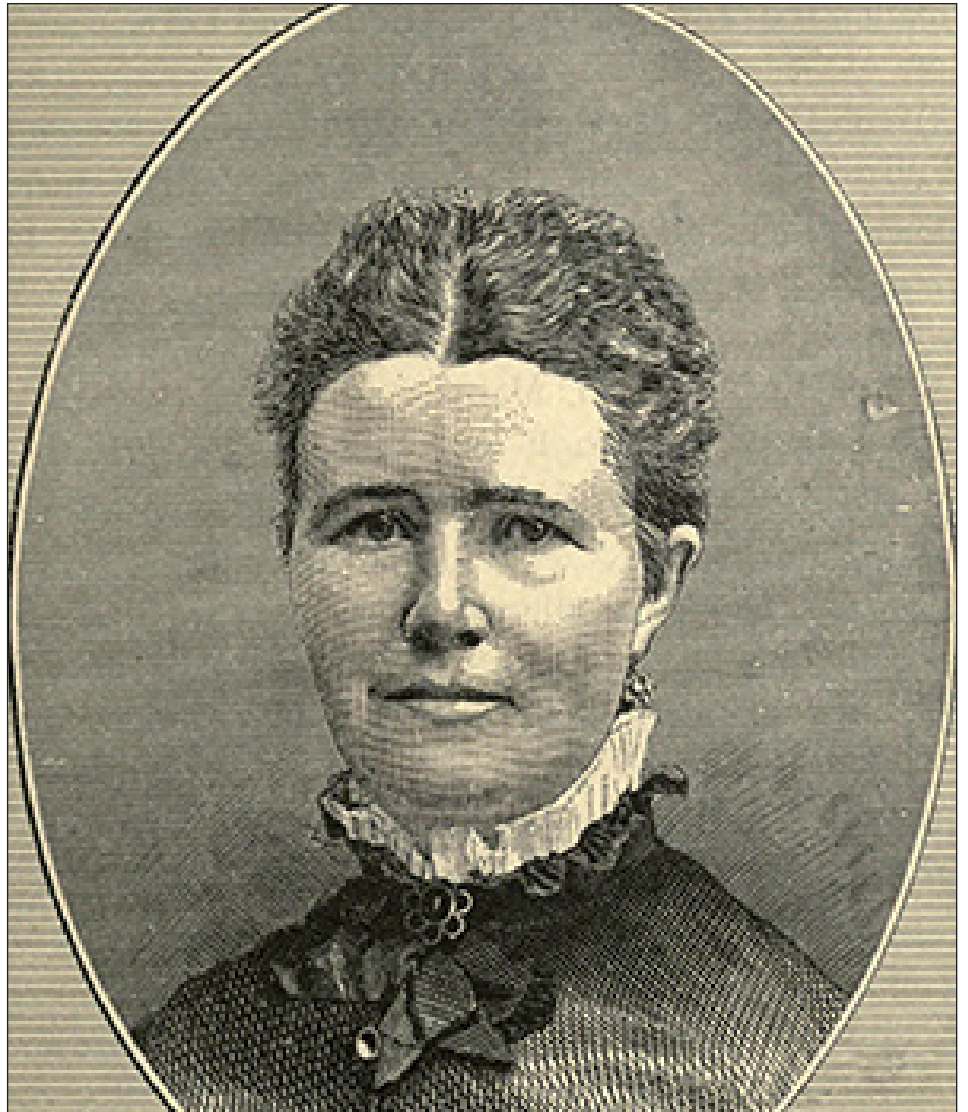
The virtual tour will provide information about the trail and will allow the public to virtually access the trail at any point in time, enabling them to fully experience the trail and its history. In addition to public viewing the video will be available at BLM's California Trail Interpretive Center in Elko, Nevada for perpetual use and archival storage. NGM contracted with Knowledge Tree Films to produce the virtual tour video. The staff and crew from Knowledge Tree Films were onsite October 18-22, 2022 doing the filming and interviews. The project is scheduled for completion in February 2023.



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wife and mother of eight children at the time of her westward crossing in 1847. She recorded her journey in a diary, which was later sent as a letter to friends back East. Dixon Smith, like Donner and Sessions, uses plain language to calculate daily distances, livestock, wagons, and goods. Yet interspersed within the entries are detailed descriptions of geological formations. Near Blacks Fork in Wyoming, Dixon Smith writes in 1847, “this large waste of country in my opinion has once been a sea my husband found on top of a mountain sea shells petrified in the stone the creases in the rocks show the different stages of the water” (128). Here readers see how Smith becomes transformed into a scientist, cataloging critical details about a yet unknown landscape.

Despite the aching beauty of the West, death is ever near for Dixon Smith and the other women settlers. Dixon Smith writes about the death of her husband upon reaching Oregon. As in the rest of her diary, she uses words sparingly in this entry. Words—and luxuries like paper—cannot be wasted. In 1847 Dixon Smith writes, “this day my Dear husband my last remaining friend died” (146). The capitalization of “Dear” implies she regarded her husband with fondness. Weighty emotion is encapsulated in a single capitalized word. In the following entry Dixon Smith briefly laments about the struggles of being a widow “in a strange land” (146). Yet nature is inextricably linked with death because in the next sentence, the next breath,



Archive.org

An engraving of Tamsen Eustis Donner’s daughter, Georgia A. Donner in 1880.

she writes one word: “cloudy” (146).

Tamsen E. Donner, Patty Sessions, and Elizabeth Dixon Smith—three distinct women whose collective voices depict life on the California Trail in the 1840s. Today, their voices linger, reminding modern readers that life, death, and the natural world are infinitely intertwined. The writings of these women settlers demonstrate

how they defied traditional female norms and firmly established their own identity in the history of the American West.

Sources (at Great Basin College)

→Holmes, K.L. (Ed.). (1995). *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & letters from the western trails, 1840-1849*. Vols 1-4. Bison Books.



DE SMET continued from Page 10

De Smet answered the longstanding call to send missionaries to the Salish tribes in the Oregon County...Father De Smet always wore the cassock and crucifix of a Jesuit priest, an American general later observed, which won him his Indian names, Black-gown and Black Robe” (82-83).

Bagley tells how De Smet spent the summer “with the tribes on their buffalo hunt” (83). He visited the camp of “a thousand Flatheads, Pend d’Oreilles, and Nez Perces at the foot of the Tetons” and said Mass in the Mountains.

Bagley highlights Father De Smet’s involvement with the first emigrant wagon train headed to California: the Bidwell-Bartleson party of 1841. This first party to California was quite ignorant of where they were heading and what the journey entailed: Bidwell thought there was not \$100 cash in the whole party, but whatever the emigrants lacked in money, knowledge, and numbers, they made up for in determination and luck. These naïve sojourners’ good fortune became apparent when they joined forces with a band of Catholic missionaries on its way to minister to the Flathead nation ‘with an old Rocky Mountaineer’ [Fitzpatrick] as their guide. Having secured approval to establish a permanent mission to the Salish peoples, the indefatigable Father De Smet printed a few thousand pamphlets that helped him raise \$1,100 dollars in New Orleans to underwrite several beneficent projects and found a Jesuit mission in the Rockies...Although the English Reformation had bequeathed a



Photo: Nunis, Ch. 15

Second passage of the Sweet Water through the rocks, dated July 7.

legacy of anti-Catholicism to nineteenth-century American Protestants, De Smet’s character won over all who met him. ‘He was genial, of fine presence, and one of the saintliest men I have ever known,’ recalled John Bidwell. ‘I cannot wonder that the Indians were made to believe him divinely protected. He was a man of great kindness and great affability under all circumstances; nothing seemed to disturb his temper’” (88).

It was Father De Smet who hired the mountain man Thomas Fitzpatrick to guide the Bidwell-Bartleson party. Fitzpatrick, an Irishman, was a long-time fur trader (since 1823) who was a most knowledgeable guide, closely acquainted with the places and peoples of the deep West. Another notable detail concerns how De Smet en-

gaged the Chief of the Kansas (while he brought up the rear of the party and waited for those who had fallen behind) to supply the party with a necessary escort. The Chief provided two warriors to guide the wagon train for “three days and nights. ‘We continued our journey to the number of seventy souls, fifty of whom were capable of

managing a rifle,’ De Smet wrote on 19 May, ‘a force more than sufficient to undertake with prudence the long march we had to make’” (Bagley 89).

Soon after the Bidwell-Bartleson party had traversed the most iconic parts of the California Trail including Fort Laramie, South Pass, Independence Rock, and Soda Springs, the two parties split up, and the Jesuit missionar-

Killoren and Nunis can be found in the Great Basin College library.

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ies went off to meet the Flathead tribes. For those looking to dive in deeper, Doyce Nunis's excellent book, *The Bidwell-Bartleson Party 1841* (1991) makes a fine companion to Bagley's narrative. The book assembles "all known memoirs and documents relating to that epic trip," and thus depicts De Smet's influence and contributions to the journey with fidelity (1).

By far the most exhaustive treatment of Father De Smet's efforts among American Indian tribes is found in John Killoren's, "*Come, Blackrobe*" (1994). De Smet's sensitivity to the issue(s) of U.S. expansion can be ascertained by the way in which he repeatedly voiced the criticisms of tribal leaders concerning officials in the Indian Office (359). In addition, the priest expressed aversion to the outright racism he encountered. As a Jesuit missionary, De Smet's mission among Indian tribes was spiritual in nature, a mission founded upon the truth that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God. As Killoren states, "the Indian-De Smet relationship extended beyond the normal spans of time and space. As a revered consultant, De Smet was in close contact with two successive generations of Indian Leaders...his role as spiritual leader was acknowledged by all the tribes he encountered on the central and northern plains and in the northern Rockies" (xiv). De Smet expresses his vexation with the ethnocentrism of American culture in his many observations:

"Whence is it that the...[Indian] bends with such difficulty to the manners and customs of the European race? Whence



Photo: Nunis, Ch. 15

Sketch of Independence Rock made by Father Point.

is it again, that the European race refuses so obstinately to sympathize with the...[Indian]; and notwithstanding its philanthropy, or love of mankind, seems rather disposed to annihilate... offspring of the same Father? Whence springs that insurmountable barrier between the two...?" (359).

Concluding volume one of his narrative, Bagley (pp. 403-404) provides details of how De Smet hoped to inspire Native Americans he was in contact with to "become more and more attached to the soil," and to take up planting crops in order to mitigate the negative transformations he perceived near on the horizon (Bagley 403). Bagley quotes from De Smet's journals extensively in this section of his trail narrative, and Killoren makes these issues (the so-called "Indian Tragedy") a substantial part of his book.

De Smet travelled 44,277 miles on the various trails. His unique involvement in Indian affairs has made (and

will continue to make) him of perennial interest to those who seek to understand Native American and U.S. relations. De Smet's involvement with the most important emigrant party in California Trail history likewise makes him a crucial figure. Of particular interest to trail historians are his diaries and papers, which include sketches of the Overland Trail made by Father Nicholas Point.

Sources (at Great Basin College)

→Bagley, Will. *So Rugged and Mountainous: Blazing the Trails to Oregon and California 1812-1848*. Volume One. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010.

→Killoren, John J. "*Come, Blackrobe: De Smet and the Indian Tragedy*." Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.

→Nunis, Doyce B. Jr., Ed. *The Bidwell-Bartleson Party 1841: California Emigrant Adventure*. Santa Cruz, CA: Western Tanager Press, 1991.



Making new community connections

Howdy! My name is Dean Straight, and I am joining Steve Hrdlicka in editing The Wagon Tongue. My family and I joined the Elko and Great Basin College community in 2020 as I join the faculty teaching English Composition, upper-level rhetoric courses, and journalism at the Elko campus.



R. Dean Straight

Due to moving here during the pandemic, I have had limited contact with the community outside of work and biking. You'll find that most of my conversations revolve around bikes and bicycle/pedestrian accessibility. I spent many years working on a copy desk while going to school – both full-time – to get somewhere on the trail of my own experiences. Even today, you'll find me walking or riding the few miles to work in rain, snow, or blistering sun just as much as you'll find

me with my sons riding our bikes along every known and unknown path in the region – still making connections about this area and its historic past.

My wife and four children moved around the Texas/Mexico border with me over the course of my academic and journalism career, observing history from the perspective of walking, riding, and observing in ways that have allowed for them to feel actively connected to those experiences. Their time in Elko has had similar connections. My wife loves to tell the story of how, while sitting in a history class in Brownsville, TX, the professor asked what they knew about the California Trail and emigration – her only understanding wrapped up in one word – Donner. Even to this day, she corrects me that she didn't necessarily yell at the top of

her lungs the name, but rather, she celebrated her knowledge somewhat enthusiastically. It is this limited understanding of what the experiences of emigrants are that is reflected in the outside world – outside the Trail, that is, which drew me to wanting to know more about the environment, the culture, and the experiences of northern Nevada. With that desire firmly in mind, I joined on to work with the California Trail Heritage Alliance and the California Trail Center to develop a multi-use trail that would connect Elko with the center as a way to reconnect the trail across the area and peoples' history with the present. Something about the idea of walking along the Humboldt River and, in some small part, the path that others walked on their way to a promised land in California, Oregon, and westward should connect us all.

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Please send all news items and articles to Steven.Hrdlicka@gbcnv.edu

The deadline for the spring issue submissions is March 15.

California Trail Center partnerships on the web

- www.facebook.com/pages/California-Trail-Center-Foundation/157116030992463
- <http://www.californiatrailcenter.org/>
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Contact information

California Trail Heritage Alliance
 P.O. Box 1778, Elko, Nevada 89803
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