ACROSS THE PLAINS FROM ILLINOIS
FROM THE DIARY OF ANDREW SOULE'

At the age of 83, Andrew Soule' wrote the story of his first trip across the plains from New Lebanon, Illinois to California in 1854, using his diary as a guide. He was a young man of twenty one or twenty two years of age when he started this trip.

On April 6, 1854 the New Lebanon Company with Willard Stone as Captain, started their long journey. There were twenty two people in this company with ages ranging from twenty five to sixteen.

On the morning of the third day, which was a Sunday, they were in Oregon City, Illinois and stayed the day for Church Services. Monday, April 10th they started on, passing many towns on the prairies of Illinois. On the evening of the 13th they were in Fulton City on the banks of the Mississippi River with a drove of 75 cows. Wind, rain and snow storms kept them from crossing until April 16th. when the storm let up and the ferryman could help them to cross safely. It was 12 o'clock that night before all were safely across the Mississippi and into Lyons City, Iowa, hungry, tired and cold.

The Company continued traveling on the 17th of April passing through DeWitt, the county seat of Clinton County, Iowa. After three more days they were in the swampy area of Upton. The country is level there with many swamp holes of mud and they had to hitch to each other to pull through it. The next day they were at Cedar River where they had to ferry again so only eight
miles were traveled that day. On the 22nd they were at Iowa City still on the prairie.

Feed was hard to find on the 23rd. There were a few settlers in the area but they could not find any corn or hay to buy so they turned their cattle out to graze on what little grass there was. As they had traveled along they had found corn at 12¢ to 15¢ a bushel and hay for $2 to $3 per ton because there was no railroad through that area yet to carry it to market. The company was very tired of eating eggs which sold at 5¢ per dozen.

The country looked all the same as they traveled through little towns and creeks. They were on the South Skunk River by the evening of the 28th. Here they met the other half of their company led by Sol Gage who had gone on ahead because of the size of the company and because many places could not feed all the stock overnight. Here they joined up again and turned all the cattle out to graze together.

On the 29th they reached Fort Des Moines where they ferried across the Des Moines River and camped. April 30th was a Sunday but they traveled as far as the Coon River where they camped so they could do their washing on Monday, May 1st. They lost a few of their horses in the river when they tried to drive the herd of horses back to shore after their swim.

From here they passed through prairies and high hills into level country without any timber in sight. From then on though, there were lots of hills and some large streams, unbridged and no ferry boats. There were no settlers but they did see one old Indian village in ruins.

Wednesday, May 11th, they traveled twenty miles and came to Kanesville just a few miles north of Council Bluffs where the council between Indians and whites had been held years before. Here they rested a few days to allow the sick to recuperate.

Kanesville is back in the hills in a ravine away from the river bottom. Decisions were made! Some of the women wanted to go back to the beautiful prairies they had passed by and take up farm land. They were afraid of being scalped by the Indians once they crossed the river. The young men wanted no part of that and
agreed to help in every way to keep from having to turn back. They readied themselves for the 500 miles of plains up the Platte River to Fort Laramie where hundreds of people and thousands of cattle were camped to form companies and select captains for their companies. The one to two mile wide, flat was covered with wagons and tents.

By Tuesday, May 15th the rain had stopped and the sun was shining. The sick were feeling better. That day they crossed the river into Nebraska and camped where the city of Omaha later sprang up. Willard Stone was again too ill to travel. A thunder shower came up so they stayed near camp and worked on two ox yokes and Sol Gage's wagon tongue.

They had only traveled 6 miles on the 18th when they had to stop to repair a bridge. Crossing over they traveled another two miles before making camp on Papare Creek. The creek was so high they had to build a bridge in order to cross over. By that time trains of emigrants had arrived and the banks of the creek were lined with wagons and camps.

May 19th thirty seven wagons crossed the bridge and traveled 15 miles to Elkhorn River where they camped for a day to wash and hunt wild turkeys. On Sunday 21st they traveled 25 miles to the Platte River. Andrew Soule' and Tim Cook were behind the wagon train. Suddenly two Indians appeared and stripped the clothes from Tim Cook. Andrew aimed a pistol at them and the Indians let loose of his horse and allowed him to go on without further trouble.

They reached Loup Fork of the Platte River on the 23rd and followed it. The next day they crossed Beaver Creek where there were plenty of Indians. The 25th took them through the ruins of several Pawnee villages.

After dinner the company was starting to travel again when tragedy struck. A 12 or 13 year old boy, a favorite of the company, was killed when he fell under the wheels of the moving wagon as he started to climb on. They wrapped him in his blankets and buried him that afternoon before traveling on up the Loup for 18 miles. They found no ford there.

On the 27th the boys on horseback found a place where the
wagons could go down the river bed for 80 rods and then come out on the other side. The river had a treacherous quick sand bottom which was ever changing. It took them all day to cross and keep a sharp look out for Indians. The next day they couldn't travel because of the rain but on the 29th they were able to travel 24 miles to Prairie Creek. That night they put out double guards but about 3 A.M. it started raining and the guards went into the tents. When daylight came and they started hitching the horses to the wagons they discovered five horses and a mule were gone. Their ropes had been cut and there were Indian blankets near by. Here they were 100 miles from anyone except the next wagon train. Nine young men started tracking but returned late that night with out having found the animals.

The yokes they had made while on the Platte River waiting out a storm and for Captain Stone to recuperate, came in handy. A yoke of oxen were hitched to the spring wagon and a yoke of cows were hitched to Gage's big wagon. They moved on again, watching carefully for Indians.

On June 1st the Company started for Wood River, a distance of 20 miles. It rained for three days making the creek too high to cross. On the 4th, they bridged the creek with poles cut from scrub box elder. The wagons were pulled across by hand. On the 7th, while camped on Skunk Creek, it rained so hard that water stood everywhere. They cut poles again to put inside the tents on which to lay their bedding so they could sleep that night. During the night two horses were stolen from the Dutch train camped near them.

There was no more timber after Skunk Creek for 200 miles. Buffalo were plentiful and they gathered buffalo chips to burn and to cook over.

They traveled across the vast plain for five days. Then on the 13th a 20 mile journey brought them to Court House Rock. Another 23 miles travel brought them to Chimney Rock on the 14th. It took all day the 15th to travel the 20 miles to Scott's Bluff. The rock bluffs and Fort Kearney and Fort Laramie are all on the south side of the Platte River. They passed many graves of those who had died of cholera along the way.
On June 19th, they were opposite Fort Laramie, the end of the level plain and are now near the Black Hills. The rest of the way is all hills and mountains.

Hoping for news from home, Andrew Soule went across the Platte River with an Indian in his canoe to Fort Laramie. What a great disappointment for all of them when there was no mail.

On the 20th the company laid over to do the washing before starting over the Black Hills on the 21st. The next six days were all up and down.

On June 28th, they came near the Platte again where the hills were all sand and the west wind blew it just like snow making new hills to travel around. Traveling was very difficult on account of these sandy conditions.

By the 29th, they arrived at the bridge over the Platte River where those traveling on the south side had to cross over to the north side. They left the Platte here and crossed the hills to the Sweet Water River.

John Gage was ill with fever and they could not travel the next day. On July 1st they traveled over the high foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Twenty six miles were traveled on July 2nd when they found a spring near Grease Wood Creek. There was no grass there and the company started out early the next morning for the Sweet Water. Here they found good grass and camped all day on the 4th of July doing their washing. That evening they celebrated by having a dance on Independence Rock.

On July 5th they traveled 11 miles to Devil's Gate where they ate and then traveled another seven miles before camping. Devil's Gate is a deep canyon with three to four hundred feet walls on each side through which the Sweet Water runs through. For three days they traveled over high hills and broken mountains along this river. Nights were cold and frosty. Sunday, July 9th, they went 10 miles north of the road where they found a good brook and plenty of grass. Here they stayed for two days. The game was plentiful and three antelope were killed and dressed out to help fill their larder.

On the 12th, they started for the Sweet Water for the last time. On the 15th, they traveled 10 miles to the top of the
divide, 7,400 feet elevation. The Atlantic on one side and the Pacific ocean on the other. From here they descended to Pacific Springs on the west side of the South Pass, the first water that flows to the Pacific. After journeying 21 miles they reached Little Sandy creek. The next day after 10 miles they reached Big Sandy Creek which they forded before going 10 more miles to camp.

On the next day they crossed 20 miles of desert. July 7th, they arrived at Green River where they were ferried across for the sum of $4. each wagon. Once across they pitched their tents for the night.

The ferry was owned by the Mormons of Salt Lake City and was a scheme to make money off the emigrants. The river had a ford where the old trail went but they had changed the road and put up signs beside the road claiming the ford had been washed out. Having taken this route the Company had to cross mountains once more to return to the old Trail which they did the following day. They took Greenhorn's cut off to the Ham fork of Green River. July 18th and 19th the Company traveled 32 miles before reaching a spring at the foot of a high mountain butting against Green River. They camped there that night. The next morning, the 20th, they started out again and by noon had reached the top where there were snow drifts and a cold wind. Descending the mountain, they followed a creek bed over all sizes of rocks from small to huge. At last after 18 miles of travel they reached the Ham's Fork of the Green River. The poor oxen and cows had such sore feet they were forced to lay-over to doctor them. They would draw a small rope between their hooves to clean out the sand and gravel and then pour hot grease into them. This treatment must have been effective but it took all day to complete.

On the 22nd the party moved on. The mountains before them had lower hills and by hard driving they managed the 14 miles which brought them to the Smith's Fork of Bear River where they camped for the night.

It was only 7 miles then to Bear River and they camped there spending a most miserable night fighting swarms of mosquitoes. They hurried out of there early the next morning and traveled west 18 miles further to Brookheart's Creek, so named for a man
who had died there. It is at the foot of a high mountain which they had to ascend the next day. The trail was steep and slanting. It was necessary to use ropes on the wagons to keep them right side up. Going down the other side, they were forced to put chains on the wheels. Twelve miles was all they could travel that day.

Mountain fever hit the group on July 26th. Harvey N. Eddy was the first. There was no feed for the animals so they had to travel on the next day regardless. After traveling 14 miles they came to a muddy creek but there was still no feed and it was pouring rain. On July 28th after traveling 18 miles they came to Soda Springs on Bear River where there was plenty of good grass. H.N. Eddy was worse and now John and Sol Gage came down with the mountain fever too. Mary Stone was ill also. They stayed here until the 30th of July.

They had reached the Crossroads now. The road to Oregon is north and west, going to the Snake River, Fort Boise and on down the Columbia River. The New Lebanon Company traveled west across a volcanic plain with deep chasms toward volcanic craters, very steep and very rough. One wagon upset, smashed the bed and broke Andrew Soule's rifle breach. They traveled over mountains all day on the 31st.

On August 1st they traveled 24 miles and found a small brook but no grass. It was night so they camped and started out early the next morning. After going 17 miles they found Clear Creek but there was no grass. Willard Stone had fever again but they had to keep going. On the 3rd they traveled along a crooked ravine and down a steep mountain, still finding no grass. At last on the 5th, after traveling 12 miles they found a creek and plenty of grass. They camped here to let the cattle eat their fill. The 7th and 8th they passed Raft River and its branch making 32 miles during that time.

On the 9th of August they had traveled as far as the Pyramids. Some columns and spires were 100 feet high. Here one road led to Salt Lake while the other led to Goose Creek over 22 miles of very rocky road. There was no wood, just petrified cedar trees so old they had turned to stone. Friday, August 11th, they
traveled 18 miles to Goose Creek canyon, following the Creek channel and then over a big ridge they came to Rock Springs and camped. They discovered a dead Indian nearby and were afraid other Indians seeing them there might think them guilty so on Sunday 13th they traveled 26 miles.

They had now reached the Thousand Springs Valley where there were both cold and hot springs and plenty of grass, making this a good place to camp. They did their washing and watched over the cattle.

The following day they passed many more hot and cold springs. The weather was hot as they passed through deep rocky canyons. On the 18th after traveling 18 miles they came to Mary's River, a branch of the Humboldt. The streams were thick with willows and the cattle like to hide in the brush. Sid Terwilliger and Sol Gage stopped with their 200 head of cattle for two weeks until they were able to travel again. Seventy Five out of those 200 died along the way.

The rest of the company continued on down the Mary's River, traveling 40 miles on the 19th and 20th. On the 21st they were only able to travel 2 miles as it was raining too hard to move on. Two cows died in that storm.

On the 22nd, 23rd and 24th they traveled 40 miles passing through high hills, one deep canyon and one dry canyon before reaching the Humboldt River. Travel was level then and they were able to travel 98 miles from the 25th through the 31st of August. They passed many dead cattle and some graves but not as many as they had passed on the Platte.

They hit heavy sand from the 1st of September until the 4th when they finally got out of it after reaching the Humboldt again. They camped there on the 5th and 6th gathering and making hay for feed. They bound it into bundles and loaded their wagons and tied all they could to the sides of the wagons in preparation for the trip across the desert. Those who didn't prepare, lost their teams and everything.

By the 7th the sick were better and the Company started across the desert shortly after midnight. They reached Antelope Spring by 9 o'clock the morning of the 8th. There was no grass so after
eating and letting the cattle rest, they traveled the rest of the day and reached Rabbit Hole Springs at midnight, a distance of 21 miles. It was barren and flat there with little water and no grass. They fed some hay and had a bite to eat before going on to Black Rock Springs, a large boiling hot springs. They arrived there at 10 o'clock on the 9th. Again they had to use their hay to feed their animals. After resting until 4 o'clock they started out again traveling all night until 8 o'clock the next morning. It was Sunday the 10th and they had traveled 29 miles. There was good water here and grass making it a good place to rest their weary bodies. The trip through the desert was unbelievable. Hundreds of dead cattle lay strung along the road. The smell was horrendous especially at night. Many wagons, camp equipment and dead oxen told a story of trouble on the desert.

Black Rock is many feet high, rising out of a level plain and from under it gushes out a boiling hot spring with a dense fog of steam. The water was 30 to 40 feet deep but so brackish of brimstone that you can't drink it without feeling sick. Nothing green growing for as far as you can see. The smell of the spring reaches for miles.

On the 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th the Company traveled over hills of low mountains, some very rocky. The feet of the cattle were sore but at least they were alive. They rested on the 15th. On the 16th they traveled 25 miles to a small brook on the east side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Two miles on the 18th brought them to the top. They descended 10 miles to a creek where some years before Fremont and Carson had camped. They traveled toward Goose Lake on the 19th. The 20th they followed the lakeshore where they had to travel through water because of a steep bluff. They camped on the west side of the lake. It took 3 days to reach Dry Creek over very rocky country. They passed Willow Creek and traveled on to Swamp Creek which was narrow and very deep but with no current. They cut down tules to form a bridge to cross on.

After traveling 12 miles on September 24th they reached Clear Lake. Here Captain Crosby and 25 volunteers were awaiting them. A short time before, the Indians had murdered a whole wagon train
and burned their wagons at Bloody Point on Tule Lake.

The New Lebanon Company camped at the Natural Bridge on Lost River. Five hundred Indians came to their camp looking for a hand-out which by then they didn't have to give. Willard Stone hired an old Indian and his wife to stay there over night with them. All the rest of the Indians left then at the command of the elderly Indian.

On the 26th they were at Lower Klamath Lake and on the 27th they were at Willow Springs. There were 30 or 40 Indians at Willow Creek but they had to camp there because it was 22 miles over a rocky road to Butte Creek.

The 28th they went up Butte Creek for 6 miles before camping. They lost a good horse there.

The last day of September they journeyed 12 miles to a swamp which is known as Grass Lake Valley now.

October 1st they traveled west 14 miles to the Snelling Ranch later called the Herd Ranch near Sheep Rock in Shasta Valley. On the 2nd they got as far as the Shasta River. They started for the Stone Ranch in Shasta Valley on the 3rd, which was their destination point, arriving there on October 4, 1854 after 180 days of active travel and 33 days of rest.

As time went on, many of the New Lebanon Company scattered. Some took up mining, some in other employment and some got discouraged and returned to their original homes.

Andrew Soule' stayed in the Shasta Valley. His son, Andrew A. Soule' became a doctor having received his medical degree at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon where there was a medical school in the 1900's. Doctor Andrew Albert Soule' practised in Klamath Falls and surrounding country for many years before his death. (See story in the 22nd issue of The Trumpeter, October/November/December 1990.)

Story courtesy of Lois Ann Soule' Scott.

Condensed and typed by
Mae L. Smith
PREPARING FOR THE TRIP

Imagine preparing for a 6 month trip across country where there were no grocery stores, hardware stores or clothing stores! No fast food restaurants. Just a few trading posts here and there.

Here is a list of the things you would need to buy in advance:
First of all--1 wagon and 3 oxen one or two milk cows
a tent with strong cords for fastening it down
extra boots and shoes and clothing for all kinds of weather
a feather bed and lots of bedding Hats to keep off the sun
1 rifle per male --- 32 gauge shot gun -- lots of ammunition
Axes-- hand saw -- cross cut saw -- plough mold -- shovels
2 or 3 augers -- candle molds -- and a good supply of rope
8 to 10 gallon keg for water -- dutch oven -- cast iron skillets
2 churns, one for sweet cream and another for sour -- wash tubs
water buckets -- tin pail -- coffee mill -- coffee pots --
tin plates and cups -- forks, knives and spoons -- butcher knives
bread pans -- sheet iron stove with broiler -- a reflector--
thread, needles, scissors, patching material

FOOD: 12 sacks of flour 400 lbs Bacon
100 lbs coffee 2 lbs tea yeast powder
500 lbs salt 3 lbs pepper 2 lbs soda
2 bu. beans 15 gallons vinegar
50 lbs lard 200 lbs sugar
4 bu. dried apples 50 lbs rice
1/2 bu corn meal 1/2 bu. parched corn
40 lbs candles 1 gross matches
30 lbs pilot bread MEDICINES school books
10 lbs nails whetstones

You should have horses too of course and drive a herd of cattle
and if planning to farm there should be a supply of seeds and
maybe a fruit tree or two. If there is any room left in the wagon
or wagons the wife usually wanted to take a favorite piece of
furniture for her new home. A wife had to be really dedicated to
her husband and family to leave everything behind to go so far from
friends and family and start a new way of life in an unknown part
of the country.
THE CONESTOGA WAGON

With the states along the Oregon Trail preparing to celebrate its sesquicentennial this year, much has appeared in newspapers and magazines about the westward movement of the pioneers. Frequently there is mention of them traveling in Conestoga wagons. This is an inaccuracy that needs to be corrected.

One of our Historical Society members has done research at the public library, and finding some discrepancies in the various sources, the following is evidence that the pioneers did not make their trek in Conestoga wagons.

About the year 1750 the farmers of Lancaster County, in eastern Pennsylvania, wanted a freight wagon that could transport their farm produce and furs from Lancaster to Philadelphia, a three or four day trip over a very poor road, really just a trail. On the return trip the freighters brought manufactured goods from Philadelphia and Europe. The carpenters of the Conestoga valley, Swiss and German craftsmen who took great pride in their work, constructed a long, wide, deep and sturdy covered wagon. Both ends of the wagon were built higher than the middle to prevent the contents from shifting. Eight or more wooden bows supported the high rounded cover which was of either canvas or white homespun material as protection against the weather.

The outside of the wagon bed was usually painted blue, and the running gear (wheels, axles and brake assembly) painted red. The wheels had broad rims to prevent bogging down in mud. These wagons were drawn by teams of from four to eight horses, with the wagoner driving from the left, seated either on the off-horse (the left wheelhorse) or standing on the lazy board (a projecting seat for the driver placed on the left side of a freight wagon within reach of the brake).

The fame of the Conestoga wagon spread quickly throughout the American colonies, and in a few years copies of the wagons were being produced in several of the colonies. Owners of Southern plantations used them to haul tobacco to Charleston and Norfolk. The farmers of New England used them to transport their fruit and vegetables to Boston, Hartford and other cities. No matter where
they were built, the name "Conestoga" remained with them.

The Conestoga wagon was responsible for American traffic moving on the right. The early colonists had introduced the English custom of keeping to the left, and carriages and wagons were driven from the right side. The Conestoga wagon had to be guided with a "jerk-line" from the left side and the drivers, in order to have a clear view of the road ahead, began to drive on the right side of the road. Because it was easier to follow the deep ruts formed by the heavy freight wagons, other drivers soon began driving on the right, and in 1813 the state of New Jersey ordered all vehicles to be driven on the right.

Following the American Revolution the Conestoga wagon, because of its sturdy construction and its ability to transport three or four tons of freight, sometimes more, and its suitability to road conditions, carried thousands of people from the eastern seaboard through the Alleghenies to the Ohio Valley which was the "Far West" at that time.

The pioneers who traveled the Oregon Trail did so in wagons built in the Middle West, and the builders were not the fine craftsmen the Germans and Swiss of Lancaster County were. They had to build wagons quickly to satisfy the demands of the thousands of pioneers pouring in from the East each month. These wagons had a shallow, flat-bottomed bed with squared ends, and a driver's seat. Oxen were the preferred animals to pull these wagons as they were better suited to the task, and were never stolen by the Indians as horses were. Because of the white canvas covers which reminded people of sailing ships at sea, the covered wagons were sometimes referred to as "prairie schooners."

The Conestoga wagon was an "aristocrat"; the covered wagon of the pioneers was a "poor relation."

The story of the Conestoga wagon ended before the start of the Civil War because of the progress made in roads, canals, railroads and newer wagons.

Researched and written by Anita Drake

Retyped for The Trumpeter by Mae L. Smith