

The Occasional Address.

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By Hon. Stephen Staats.

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I am one of those old Pioneers, having come to Oregon in 1845, and I have been selected by the Board of Directors of the Pioneer Association to deliver the address descriptive of the emigration of 1845, and this is the occasion upon which it is to be delivered; and I would shrink from the task assigned me did I not feel well assured that your knowledge of my abilities will not warrant you in anticipating a great display of oratory in my effort upon this occasion. Born upon the shores of the Atlantic, leaving the home of my childhood in early youth, and traveling westward until I reached the shores of the Pacific, and not having had the advantages of education that the youth of Oregon enjoy today, it is a source of much embarrassment to me to prepare an address, which, according to the rules of the Association, must be prepared in manuscript, placed in the printer's hands, and form part of the record of its transactions, and ever be a memento of my success or failure upon this to be memorable occasion. What I present to you to-day in relation to the emigration of 1845 is almost entirely from memory, and therefore it cannot be as correct and perfect a narrative as one could give had he preserved a journal of minutes, and events as they occurred at the time. Then let me commence by saying that all through the month of April the hardy Pioneers, those in search of the promised land, beautiful Oregon, were making their way to the rendezvous, on the western bank of the Missouri river, just opposite the now populous city of St. Joseph. That was to be the starting point for all Missourians, they being a large majority of the emigrants of that year. My mind has often reverted to that period, when about three hundred persons encamped on the bank of the Missouri, their hearts beating joyously in anticipation of the bright and prosperous future before them, should they ever reach the Mecca of their hopes, bright Oregon, as pictured to them by friends who had preceded them and declared they had reached the paradise of earth. The sight of that camp ground, with a hundred blazing fires,

around which might be seen the fond mother, the true-hearted wife preparing the frugal meal, the joyous little ones dancing with delight, and the young man and maiden billing and cooing like two turtle doves. It was a sight a king might envy. And yet, with all their mirth and joyousness, moments would come when busy though scanned the future, and led them to ponder upon the dangers of the wilderness they were about to traverse, and the journey before them were well worth serious contemplation. To travel two thousand miles with all the appliances and conveniences of modern times is but a matter of a few hours or days at most; but to pursue the same distance through an almost trackless desert, with oxen and wagons, requires an undaunted courage deserving of success; and fellow Pioneers, have you met with success? Have you been amply repaid for all your toil and labor in reaching this beautiful valley? Would you again undertake the journey to secure what you have secured towards the enjoyment of life? Methinks I hear from every old Pioneer's heart the answer, I would. The possession of health, of ease and contentment in this blessed land of ours is satisfaction an hundred fold for all the dangers and toil of the past.

The first day of May, 1845, was the appointed time when we were to break camp and begin our perilous journey. Every one was active in making preparations for that eventful period; some were breaking oxen, some were making yokes, some making tents, and some preparing for matrimony, unconcerned about the future. Some days before starting, preparations were made to withstand the assaults of the wiley savage, should assaults be made. We formed a regular military company, elected Col. T'Vault Captain, John Waymire, now a resident of Dallas, Lieutenant, James Allen, Seargent, and others to fill the various minor offices; had a time each day to go through all the evolutions and drill of a military company, and all seemed to vie with each other in the performance of the duty assigned them. On the day appointed we made a start, Capt. T'Vault leading the company with all the majesty of a crowned emperor, seconded by his Lieutenant John Waymire, who bestrode his steed as stately as Don Quixote in attacking the windmill. Noble-hearted old John! Methinks I hear him today, in his old accustomed

stentorian tones, about "close up, close up; why the devil don't you keep close together; the Indians could kill all in the forward wagons before you'd know it, and then come back and scalp the last one of you fellows here behind!" We traveled on for a few days- (I will here mention that our company consisted of 61 wagons and about three hundred souls all told. Capt. Solomon Tetherous' company consisted of 66 wagons and about the like number of persons. There were also other companies, which I may refer to hereafter). As I stated, we traveled on for a few days without any incident worth mentioning until the night before we reached the Platte river; we had traveled all day until late in the evening, and then had to camp without water for ourselves or cattle. Those who had brought along a sufficient quantity of water hastily prepared a cup of tea before retiring for the night, while those who were not so fortunate lay down to rest and dream of times to come when they would suffer no more the deprivation of that soothing beverage. Early in the morning we started for the river, and when reached, great was our rejoicing, and many a parched tongue was refreshed in the limpid stream. Traveling along up the Platte, one night there were mysterious movements in and about the camp. Cupid, always on the alert to pierce the unsuspecting victim, had sped his dart with such unerring certainty that the pierced victims could find no salve to their bleeding hearts but in the solemnization of the marriage ceremony; so Capt. T'Vault was engaged as "master of ceremonies" to unite in goly wedlock these two pierced victims, and thus enable them to rejoice that though Cupid may wound the heart, a marriage certificate can ease the pain.

But again to my narrative; we continued our journey up Platte until we reached Fort Laramie without any remarkable event occurring; but at the Fort a circumstance occurred which would startle the belles of Salem, and cause their clerks to pale and horror. An emigrant by the name of Bailey had a beautiful daughter, whom a Sioux brave most ardently desired to adorn his wigwam and bead his moccasins; about noon one day, this daughter went pail in hand to the river for water, the dusky brave at the same time was laying in ambush to capture this

piece of feminine beauty, and when he made a spring to clutch the prize, she was like the Irishman's flea, she "wasn't there," but was outstripping the wind in the direction of camp, and distanced the wiley savage so much that he became more enamored of her than ever, and he had to be shown some trusty rifles before he would desist from his ardent courtship. The course of true love not running very smooth with this noble brave in that case, he entered into negotiations with one of our female emigrants for the purchase of her daughter, and the handsome price of twenty horses being offered for her, I became extremely fearful, lest the mother would accept the offered price, and thus deprive me of a much coveted prize. Now if that bargain had been consummated it is a very doubtful question whether he, who now addresses you, would have been present on this happy occasion, but the bargain was not made, I am here to-day, and you can guess whether or not I came off victorious; whether or no I secured the much coveted prize.

After leaving Fort Laramie, we pursued the even tenor of our way without any extraordinary events happening. Before reached Fort Boise, some of the company had exhausted their supply of flour, and they had to depend upon what short allowances they might receive from their fellow travelers, and what scanty food they could procure from straggling bands of Indians they met with. Some of the families subsisted for weeks on dried salmon procured from the Indians, so much so, that they cannot even bear the sight of one of those scary denizens of the deep even to this day.

When nearing Fort Boise, much discussion was had relative to the route to be followed after leaving that point. Stephen Meek had met the emigrants and proposed to pilot them over a new route by which to bring them into the valley, asserting that it was much shorter and better than the route to The Dalles. I recollect one old gentleman, John M. Forrest by name, who when the subject was warmly discussed, declared he would follow the old route, even if he had to travel alone-says he, "when I left the States, after reading the letters of Bonnett and others from Oregon, I determined I would not be led off on any new route claimed to have been discovered by an adventurer, but would travel where others had traveled, and thus be sure of arriving at the desired

ion. One morning, after a night spent in spirited discussion, Mr. Forrest broke camp and started on the old trail, others with much warmth attempted to restrain him, but he persisted and about twenty-five other wagons followed his; others under the leadership of Meek, struck off on the route declared by him the best and shortest; but well would it have been for all those so doing, had they preserved in following the old route, for experience proved to them, that had they so done, much suffering, in almost every conceivable form would have been avoided, and that they would have arrived at their destination much sooner and their condition more hopeful as to future resources to provide for their wants during the approaching winter.

It was but a few days after Meek left Fort Boise, that he became hopelessly lost, and had it not been for the good judgment and determined energy of some of the emigrants, and their hiring an Indian to pilot them through to The Dalles, many would have perished and suffered a most torturing death, that now survive and to-day can recount the many sad incidents and afflictive events of their wearisome travel to that point. It has been positively asserted that while Meek was thus lost, that he suffered to such an extent for the want of water to satisfy his thirst, that he opened a vein in the neck of his mule, and thus in all probability secured his own life by quaffing the life's blood of that most noble and docile quadruped. But be that as it may, whether true or not, there were moments, when the sufferings of husband, wife and children, became so unbearable, and so intensely torturing to the mental vision of those having others depending upon them for support and protection, that had he who counseled them to take an unknown and trackless route when almost out of provisions, and energies already nearly exhausted, made his appearance among them, he might have been a sacrifice to appease the angry passions with which they were inflamed.

Those who took the old route, arrived at The Dalles in good season without incurring any other trials than would naturally result from their mode of travel. To the best of my recollection, Capt. Barlow's company was the first to arrive at The Dalles, others following in quick succession. Here was a stopping place for the rolling of the wagon wheel, and it became necessary to provide some mode of conveyance

looked for end of their travel. Barlow with great energy and undaunted courage urged the idea of crossing the Cascades with our wagons by cutting our way through, but those living at The Dalles and having a thorough knowledge of the difficulties, and making them known to the emigrants, they discarded the idea and proceeded to make rafts to convey their families and wagons down the river to Vancouver, whilst others prepared to drive their stock over the mountains by an old Indian trail to the Willamette valley. I was with those driving the stock, and a trying time we had of it. I recollect one instance in particular: We had about one hundred and fifty head of cattle, and in crossing one of the main spurs of the mountain leading from Mt Hood's snowy peak, there came on a heavy snow storm, with a wind blinding to the sight; so much so, that we lost all trail of the cattle, and struck for a camping place, regardless of distance or direction, and fortunately we had to travel but a short distance till we found one, with a fine supply of grass for our almost famished horses, and a plentiful supply of material with which to make a fire, and restore a degree of warmth to our chilled bodies.

There was one, and only one female with us at the time, and she suffered intensely from the cold; she was illy prepared to withstand the chilling storm, being scantily clothed; but her husband, true to the instincts of a noble manhood, divested himself of his own well worn blanket, and helped to shield her shivering frame from the inclement storm. Tears were shed that day by men unused to weeping, at witnessing the sufferings of that lone female without the power for the time being to give relief. That lady was Mrs. Waldron, daughter of Mr. Lemmons, long a resident of Marion county, but now deceased. I said we lost all our cattle on that day, but there was one exception; "old Uncle Davy Carson" an old mountaineer and a fellow traveler with us from Missouri, with more than ordinary courage and endurance, had a favorite cow which he singled out and determined to drive with him to camp wherever that might be, and he succeeded, and long after his arrival in Oregon, enjoyed the benefits to be derived from such a precious milker. Now as to the other lost cattle, early in the morning after the storm, Uncle Davy Carson, with a few trusty and dauntless spirits took the back trail

in search of them, and after a toilsome and tedious ascent, found them huddled together, high up between two ridges running down from old Mt. Hood, with his covering of perpetual snow; and so completely bewildered, that it was almost impossible to start them from their sheltered nook; but Uncle Davy with true grit and unabated energy determined that to camp they must go; and go they did, but not until Uncle Davy became so wearied with excessive exertion that he must resort to some means to refresh himself, so after casting about for a time, a bright idea struck him, (though he was always in the habit of being similarly stricken), espied a bell suspended from the neck of a poverty stricken cow, and immediately made for it; it was soon stripped from the cow and in a few minutes the lacteal fluid from the gentle beast had filled it to the brim, and soon Uncle Davy was himself again. The refreshing beverage restored him to new life and animation, and he shortly came shouting into camp with not a hoof missing.

But Uncle Davy is gone, peace to his ashes; a kind thought to his memory, and may some abler pen than mine, at some future time recount the nobleness of his actions in all his intercourse with his fellow man.

We reached Oregon City in thirteen days from The Dalles, (two of which we were without food), and on our arrival, those of us in advance were kindly and hospitably received by old Dr. McLoughlin. He immediately furnished us with provisions without money and without price, and extended to us favors which we were ever ready to reciprocate. I am not one of those who wish to cast reflections on the character of Dr. McLaughlin or wish to impute to him anything wanting in the kindest feelings towards the emigrants of 1845. For well do I know, that but for him, many would have been more embarrassed in making provision for the coming winter's necessities than they were, and I have yet to see the emigrant of 1845, who when speaking of the "old man Doctor," does not speak in high commendation of his actions towards the emigrants of that year.

The companies that followed the "Meek cut-off," were much longer in reaching The Dalles, and the emigrants endured all the suffering both mentally and physically, that human nature was capable of enduring.

And had it not been for a few courageous spirits, they would have been hopelessly lost, and suffered an excruciating torture and death, where no human aid could have brought them relief, and where hearts recently beating with hopes of future happiness and prosperity, sank down almost to despair and breathing condemnation upon the author of all their calamities. But thank God, most of them arrived in safety, and some of them are here to-day, enjoying the fruits of thier labor, their countenances beaming with smiles of pleasure and ever ready to recount to surrounding friends the recollections of that eventful period to which their minds now revert, with malice toward none, and with thankfulness for deliverance from the perils in which they were involved.

I was but a youth when I crossed the plains in 1845, and therefore was free from the great responsibilities resting upon the shoulders of those of maturer years and having wives and children dependant upon them for support and protection; but now, having assumed the same responsibilities, having my thoughts, my energies, my attention, all directed towards contributing to the domestic happiness of those composing the family circle, I have often been led to conjecture, what must have been the emotions swelling the breast of the true hearted man, when leaving the abodes of civilization in search of a new home he cast his eyes about him, and reflected for a moment upon the toil and dangers to which he was about to expose those dearest to him upon earth; what must have been the feelings of the fond hearted mother, when gazing upon her loved offspring, she contemplated for a moment the dread consequences that might ensue, before she should find a place she could again call "Home." Yet, with all her anxiety of mind, with all her fearful apprehensions, she exhibited a courageous disposition well calculated to nerve the manly heart and cause it to thrill with a grateful remembrance for her noble devotion to him who risked all for the future prosperity of all concerned, for those composing the entire family circle. But at that time, I was a little more conversant with the thoughts of those of my own age, free from care, with no apprehension for the future, our only object was present pleasure, and I can truly say, the youth of that emigration had many periods of enjoyment while



crossing the plains. I see around me to-day, some faces, then rosy with youth, that participated in making joyous the dreary desert by the ringing laughter of some beautiful maiden at the mishaps of some luckless wight during the day's travel. I see before me him who, violin in hand, discoursed most beautiful music, whilst others danced by the light of the moon till the old violin squeaked the hour for rest. There is to be a dance tonight, and I hope my friend Simeon Smith will bring out that old violin and give us that good old tune, "Pretty Betty Martin," which he played all the way across the plains, and then perhaps even I might be tempted to trip the light fantastic toe with some of those who thirty odd years ago danced upon the velvety plains of Platte, and the sandy valleys of the Columbia, and who present with us to-day, and perhaps are thinking now of that old violin.

I must not forget to mention my friend General Joel Palmer, who was first chosen to deliver the Occasional Address at this time, but owing to impaired health, he was compelled to decline the invitation tendered him by the Directors of the Pioneers' Society, and you have missed a great intellectual treat by his non appearance before you to-day. He was an emigrant of 1845, and being a man of varied experience, and of an observant character, I deeply regret that circumstances prevented him from presenting to us to-day such an array of facts and incidents connected with the emigration of 1845, which he certainly could have given, had time and circumstances been propitious for the preparation of an address bearing upon events connected with that year's travel. Palmer was Captain of a company, that made its starting point from Independence, Missouri, and was composed of about forty wagons. He was also one of those who first made the attempt to cut his way through the Cascade mountains to the Willamette valley. Just before reaching The Dalles, he with a few others of his company, went in advance of the wagons to spy out the land, and view out a shorter route to reach the trail where it entered the mountains. They were successful; they then returned to their teams, drove forward in the direction they had viewed out and camped on a creek bottom, the waters of which flowed from Mount Hood's snowy peak, and where they found grass for their horses and cattle, and then went to work to cut a road

across a mountain that never had had the imprint of wagon wheel since the first dawn of creation. Others of the company took the road by the way of The Dalles, and those dauntless spirits hewing their way through a heavily timbered mountain, sent word by them to the settlers in the valley concerning the work they were engaged in, and that they desired assistance, both in the way of provisions and labor. They procured their labors in cutting their way through until it became too late in the season to accomplish their object, and so had to abandon the work and return to the camp previously made, where they proceeded to build a cabin for the preservation of their wagons and baggage through the winter, and until they could return for the same next season. Three young men, whose names I do now recollect, were left in charge of the camp, and they were furnished with supplies for their winter's use by persons in the Willamette valley, who had received word of the efforts of these energetic men to cross the mountains and the scarcity of provisions with which they were supplied.

In the spring of 1846, Palmer was one of the six who started and traveled across the plains to their homes in the Eastern States, and he returned with his family again in 1847, since which time he has been a true resident Oregonian. You see the General has made three trips across the plains, and what has passed before his vision-naturally and mentally-could it be related to this audience, I think they could then say they had been agreeably entertained. But the idea of giving a description of the emigration of 1845, is a little preposterous, when limited to the brief space of one hour. Every individual emigrant has had his own experience and knowledge of events as they have transpired, and the longest day that Oregon ever witnessed, would scarcely be sufficient time in which to recount the many circumstances, and events of an interesting character that transpired during that weary tramp across the plains.

It has been the duty of him who delivered the Occasional Address to call the roll of the persons composing the emigration of which he was a party. I asserted in advance the impossibility of my complying with that part of the programme, owing to the lapse of time, and to my utter inability to prepare a roll that would do justice to the persons

composing the emigration of 1845; and had it been possible, the calling the names of two thousand individuals would prove monotonous, and well calculated to exhaust the patience of the people assembled here. And yet, I do not deem it out of place to refer to some few individuals who crossed the plains in 1845; you have some of them in your midst who have been residents of Salem and vicinity for many years. Where is Wm. J. Herren? He is amongst us to-day, enjoying in retrospect the pleasing associations of the past, when, ox goad in hand during the day, he anticipated a joyous occasion when assembled around the camp-fire at night. He has been a prominent member of society, been elevated to many positions of trust and responsibility by the free choice of the people, and to-day occupies a position to which his devotion to the interests of the agricultural classes justly entitles him. There is John Durbin, Sen., who in 1845 was as robust and hearty as any amongst us to-day, but who now, in the decline of life, can look back to those days when all his energies were called into full play to preserve that large band of cattle from the thieving clutches of the red man, and I think I can safely say that those little reminiscences of the past are not altogether to a saddening character. And you have Rufus A. Riggs among you, who has the record of the journeyings of a principal part of the emigration of 1845 in his possession, and had I obtained possession of that record a few days sooner, I might then have prepared for you a feast that would have been more decidedly interesting than this desultory address with which you are now afflicted. James B. Riggs, the father of Rufus, who also was an emigrant of 1845, has gone the way of all the earth, after traversing the plains and living and enjoying all of life's comforts in this delightful clime; he died highly respected and honored by all with whom he was acquainted. Marion county was and is the home of many of the emigrants of '45. Where are your Smiths, your Taylors, your Williams, your Simmons, your Halls, your Englishes, and others I might mention? Some of them are yet actively engaged in the performance of life's duties, whilst others have ceased from their labors, and laid them down to rest, free from the cares and turmoils of life, and deeply regretted by friends who survive them. Capt. English, whom you all knew, and who struggled under as severe and try-

ing circumstances as any of the emigration of that year to reach this coast, after a long, arduous and eventful life, has departed from our midst and left behind him a name the synonym of hospitality and honesty.

I noticed in the Statesman a day or two ago the inquiry, Where are the Pioneer printers? In answer, I will say that one of them has gone to the spirit land, there to enjoy the reward of a well spent life. I allude to Mr. John Fleming, a pioneer of 1845. I had the pleasure of an intimate acquaintance with him during the journey across the plains, and can recall to mind many acts of kindness which he did to myself and others during that trip. He was a resident of Oregon City, and his hands were amongst the first to set type in the publication of a paper in Oregon. Although conversing frequently with him on the subject of setting type and printing in general, I then little dreamed of the manifold duties of the printer. It is a busy life of condensing and rearranging, tearing down and building up, transforming badly spelled and poorly punctuated and miserably written manuscript; yet he loves it, and Fleming was equal with any other in his attachment to the art preservative. I hope if this manuscript comes into the printer's hands he will treat it tenderly, if for no other reason than out of respect for my departed friend Fleming, who could always appreciate the intention of the writer, and at the same time denounce the writing. Peace to his ashes, and may his name retain an abiding place in the memory of Oregon types.

I cannot conclude this address without mentioning another Pioneer of '45. I will say that the name of J. C. Avery has long been favorably known throughout the length and breadth of the valley. On his arrival in Oregon, he settled on the Willamette, near the mouth of Mary's river, and continued to reside there up to the day of his death. He was founder and proprietor of the city of Corvallis, and lived to see it one of the most thriving towns in the valley. He occupied many prominent positions in public affairs, and was always esteemed for his indomitable energy and perseverance in everything having a tendency to advance the interests of his adopted State. He now sleeps the sleep that knows no waking, and his friends will ever hold in remembrance the kindly associations connected - 10 - with his eventful life.