William Hockett was Jesse Hockett's older brother. Jesse was the baby in this story. Jesse was Ray Hockett's grandfather. See page 3

INTRODUCTION

(This company was made up of Quakers)

In the following account which I have written of our travels across the plains, I wish it understood that I have depended upon my memory for but very few of the details. I have a number of letters written by my father while on the road and sent back to his father. The letters are not in the form of a diary, but written in "Sections" as he says in his letter, written just at such times as he could get the chance. I have given dates and circumstances just as he did in substance, but used my own language. While there are many places and happenings that I remember as distinctly as things that happened lately, I have avoided relating those things; but sickness, deaths and burials I seem to see just as they occurred, I have been surprised in reading my father's letters to note how little he said about deaths of other members of the company other than of us Salem people, but I suppose he thought our folks here would not know anything about them. He speaks highly of them and of their kindness and said he never expected so much kindness from strangers as he had met with our company; and I have always wondered why they left us when we were all sick in the Burnt River Mountains, as that was where we had our worst suffering. Small as I was I thought we would all die there, and I almost hoped we would all die together. One entire family died there in the new company. When we started on, they pulled the wagons together, took out their provisions and set fire to the wagon, took their livestock and went on. I never knew who they were or where they were from. Anyone reading this may know that it is strictly true, as my father's letters show plainly that there is not coloring or exaggeration

used, and even now after the expiration of over 66 years, I cannot read these letters without feeling a horror or what my parents, sister and uncle must have endured, and their sufferings were no worse than the sufferings of hundreds of others of the emigrants in 1847, as that has passed into history as the sickly season on the plains.

W.A. Hockett

EXPERIENCES OF W.A. HOCKETT ON THE OREGON TRAIL

In the spring of 1846 there was a small company organized at Salem, Iowa, for the purpose of crossing the plains to Oregon. I do not know what prompted them to undertake the trip, neither do I remember the names of any of the company except one. It seems that one, Edward Tremble, was the leading spirit in the movement, as it was always spoken of as the Tremble Company. Sometimes during the summer of 1846 letters were received by their friends at Salem, stating that Edward Tremble had been killed by the Pawnee Indians on Platt River. It seems that was about the only misfortune that befell the company. They got through safely, early in the fall, before the rainy season, and settled near Oregon City on the Willamette River, and wrote back in such glowing terms about the country that a great many people began to talk about emigrating to Oregon; but when it came to a showdown, there were but four families from Salem that made preparations for the journey; and these families were not an organized company, but just banded together as emigrants to cross the plains.

The company consisted of:

Henderson Lewelling and wife,

One daughter, 16 years old,

One son, 14 years old.

Spicer Tease, a young man about 21,

who went as a teamster without other compensation than expenses.

John W. Fisher (Son-in-law of Mr. Lewelling), and wife,

and daughter about 4 years old.

Enos Mendenhall and wife,

a young married couple just commencing housekeeping.

Nathan H. Hockett (my father), and mother,

one sister 16 years of age,

a brother 14 years of age,

myself 9 years,

a baby brother 18 months old.

(Baby Ruth, past two years old was left in the care of her grandfather. Her father said he would come back for her in two years.)

Thomas Hockett (my father's brother) who had a wife and three children, but left them here in Iowa. He went along to assist on the journey and to see the Western Country.

The greater part of the winter was spent in making preparations for the trip. It was arranged that all draft animals should consist of oxen, but each family should have a least one saddle horse. While none of the company would have been called wealthy, yet all had ample means to provide themselves well for the journey; Henderson Lewelling with two wagons and teams, John Fisher, one wagon and team, and Mr. Lewelling and Mr. Fisher fitted out one wagon and team in partnership, which was loaded with nursery stock, seeds, picks and such tools as they thought they would need in the nursery business, as they intended to make that their business when they got to Oregon. Mr. Mendenhall fitted out one wagon and team and bought up 25 head of young cows and heifers, as he intended to go into the stock business. My father fitted out two wagons and teams and bought up 50 head of young cows and heifers, as he also intended to go into the stock business, but was in no way in partnership with anyone. So you see our company consisted of 7 wagons and teams, 4 saddle horses, 75 head of stock cattle and 17 men, women and children.

By the 1st of April it was considered all necessary provisions had been made for the trip, and on the 10th of April, 1847, we bade farewell to friends and relatives and started for St. Joseph, Missouri intending to cross the river at that point and finish laying in provisions at that

place to save hauling it, as grass was not yet good and we would have to haul feed for the stock. We made slow progress on account of bad roads and high waters. When we got opposite St. Joseph we learned that the ferry boat was at least one week behind hand in setting passengers across the river, so we sent two men to St. Joseph on horseback to get what letters might be there for us, and we went on to Savannah, Missouri, where we found plenty of provisions such as we wished and at reasonable prices: flour at $3.00 per barrel, bacon 3¢ per pound, shoulders and hams 4¢ per pound, coffee 10 pounds to the dollar, etc.

After supplying all our needs, we traveled on to Independence, Missouri, a small town. We arrived at the Missouri River May 14th, 1847, crossed the same day and went into camp where there were about 200 wagons, and two or three companies had already started on the trail. There was a company being organized and we made application to be admitted into the company, and were accepted. There were about 90 wagons in all. On May 17, 1847 we started an our westward march. After traveling several days we learned that almost all the company were Mormons and emigrants bound for California, and expected to travel the South pass; and as we intended to travel the north pass, which we called the Marcus Whitman Trail, we thought best to withdraw from the company, which we did. So the Salem company withdrew and thirteen other wagons that were bound for Oregon withdrew, making our company consist of twenty wagons.

We laid by the next day and reorganized, re-numbered the wagons and elected Thomas Hockett, my uncle, captain, and on May 20th started on; but as we had several hard rain storms, which made the roads very bad and gave us a great deal of trouble about crossing the water courses, some days we would scarcely get out of sight of our camping place of the night before,

and it seemed that each day was only a duplicate of the day before. May the 30th we arrived at a beautiful small stream called Little Blue where we laid by, as many of the company were nearly unable to travel. John Fisher who was quite unwell, was much worse, but after one day's rest we started on, and on June 4th we came to the Platt River. John Fisher was much worse, but we moved on nine miles the next day and laid by, and on June 6th, about 6 o'clock in the evening, John Fisher died. A company of forty wagons came up and on learning of his death, went into camp near us and remained until after the burial. A grave was dug at the north side of the road nine miles from where we first came to Platt River, on the bank of a small stream, near a bunch of willows. The grave was dug about as common and cottonwood poles split and the grave lines up with these. He was buried in his usual wearing apparel, the grave filled up and sodded over. As no stone could be found, a post was set at the head of the grave with his name carved on it, "John W. Fisher, died June the 6th, 1847, aged 31 years." About one rod north from the grave a post was set in the ground and a mound thrown up around it, as a section corner is fixed in Iowa by the surveyors. About 80 or 100 people witnessed the burial.

We heard of a great deal of sickness in other companies, but this was the first death, and there were but few well persons in our company. It was usually called the camp fever and was believed by some to be contagious, and by many to be caused by bad drinking water. We heard of many deaths in other companies. We broke camp that same afternoon and moved on with aching hearts, not knowing what trials we would have to meet with further on.

We were now in the heart of the Pawnee land and the Sioux and Pawnee were at war. We saw many bands of Indians, as many as 500 or 600 in a company, but they did not give us much

trouble yet. June 9th we were overtaken by a hard thunderstorm. It would be impossible to give a description of a rain storm on the plains so that it could be realized by one who had never had the experience, and the rain is almost always mixed with snow, hail or sleet. We went into camp on a stream that we could not cross, and as there was a nice, open valley about two or three miles wide, the cattle and horses were allowed out in the valley feeding without guards and about 9 o'clock it just seemed that the Indians just raised out of the ground among the cattle and horses, each swinging his blanket, yelling as no one but an Indian can, and they stampeded every hoof of stock we had except four saddle horses that were tied to the wagons, and run them off towards the foothills some two or three miles away, but as they neared the hill land the horses circled around the Indians and came back to camp, but by the time the horses could be caught and got in readiness to go in pursuit, the cattle and Indians were out of sight. About twenty-five of the men who were in pursuit struck the trail and soon overtook them, but not until they had killed thirteen head of cattle. The first sight the Indians got of our men they fled and were out of sight in the gulches and rough land. As my uncle and J.M. Robinson was out in the direction hunting, a part of the men rounded up the cattle and started back to camp, while the others went to look for the hunters. After while they found them, but the Indians had found them first and robbed them of their guns and clothing, leaving them nothing but their hats and boots. My uncle resisted so stubbornly about being robbed that they bent him over until his head was on his knees, and then the chief beat him over the back with his bow. Some places the skin was split four or five inches. Robinson was not injured. They got $7.50 in silver from my uncle June 15th. The Indians had been giving us more or less trouble ever since they ran our cattle off so we went into camp until

the same company of forty wagons came up that had been present at the burial of John Fisher. My uncle drove the Widow Fisher's team and she and her little girl rode in our family wagon, and J.M. Robinson acted as Captain. June 16th the company expected came up with us and said that a small company consisting of eight wagons had been attacked by the Indians, all their stock run off, the wagons robbed of everything they wanted, and even the men, women and children robbed of most of their clothing. Another large company had taken them in and had promised to see them through. We here thought best to keep near together until we got across South Platte. We would be so close to Ft. Laramie then that we hoped the Indians would not bother us.

So we traveled on several days in this way but did not camp together. We saw many bands of Indians, always moving the same direction we were, but gave us no more trouble. My uncle's back gave him so much trouble, that the Widow Fisher took in a young man by the name of Henry Willoby to drive her team, but she continued to ride with us. Then my uncle could rest. I well remember of hearing him make a solemn vow that he would never miss a chance of killing an Indian when he could do so without endangering the lives of others. His back soon healed up, but he carried the scars.

June 17th we crossed the South Platt and were now on the Marcus Whitman trail, or the north pass. June 19th my father and uncle killed the first buffalo that had been killed by our company, though we had killed very many antelope and some deer and elk. Many of our company were very unwell at this time so that it was difficult to find well men to stand guard at night and many teams were driven by women, but we were in hopes that the sickness was caused by bad water, and the water seemed to be getting better. On June the 28th we arrived at

Ft. Laramie where there was a stockade and a company of dragoons, as the cavalry was called then in that country.

We went into camp near the Fort. We found out that there was to be a great war dance that night by the Pawnee Indians, as they had been successful in a battle with the Sioux and had carried off a number of scalps and wished to celebrate the victory. The soldiers allowed them to have the dance inside the stockade, but they were not allowed to carry any arms. A number of our company went to the fort that night. I was allowed to go with my uncle; but when that dance was started, if ever a boy wished he was somewhere else, I was certainly that boy. I was certain we would all be killed. I do not think anyone could describe that performance so that one could realize what, it looked like. There must have been 300 or 400 jumping, writhing, yelling, and twisting and waving those Sioux scalps which were held on the end of sticks about four feet long.

On June 29th we broke camp and started on our Westward march. July 4th, laid by to let the stock rest and to let the women wash. We were now about 80 miles from Ft. Laramie, and we thought half way to Oregon. About 100 miles a week was the best we could do, The trail led up the Sweet Water, a tributary of the Platt River. July 7th, Thomas Hockett, my uncle, was taken sick with the dreaded fever a few days before this and was very bad. He was unconscious of the time. July 16th we laid by to await the results of my uncle's sickness. Our camp was at the Devil's Gate on Sweet Water, in a beautiful valley some three miles wide where the river cuts through a spur of the mountain.

A number of our company have died, but I an unable to give the names or just how many, The burials have been at night on account of the Indians robbing the graves for the wearing

apparel. The graves were concealed by building a fire on them and then driving the entire train of wagons over them when we broke camp in the morning. July 20th, my uncle has so far recovered that we were on the trail again and 185 miles from Ft. Laramie, but many of the company were very sick and it was a great difficulty to find enough well persons to drive the teams and stand guard nights.

August 4th we were in the Burnt River Mountains, laid by on account of the sickness, mostly confined to the four families from Salem. My father was among the number. My sister and oldest brother both were taken sick here. As there was another company of 20 wagons laid by on account of sickness, our company concluded to move on and leave us, which they did. I cannot tell how long we remained here, but it must have been three weeks. All of one family of the new company died and all of our Salem folks got much better, so that my sister and brother got well and my father so far recovered that he drove the team a few days. The last date in his memorandum was August 16, 1847. Our company concluded to leave the Whitman trail, stay on the south side of Snake River, take that we called the Green River cut-off.

From Big Sandy to Green River was 45 miles, of sandy desert without vegetation or water, but would save about 100 miles drive. We laid by at the Big Sandy, rested the stock, filled every available cask with water and made the start just before sundown, drove the night, the next day, the next night and until sometimes in the forenoon the next day without any food or water for the stock only what was hauled. I do not think we lost any of the stock, but so much of the water was given to the stock that there was much suffering among the people. I rode a horse at night and urged up the straggling cattle and rode in the wagon in the heat of the day.

The last time I can remember of seeing my father alive he came back on the last night and brought me some coffee and thought we would get to Green River by sun-up. I think he must have taken a relapse about this time for his death was recorded in the family Bible, August 22, 1847. I well remember his death and just how he looked, but I do not remember his burial. Up to this time my mother and little brother has been well. We were now following down Snake River on the south side.

Our course was much the same as Snake River, but as yet had not been near to it, but on the evening of August 27th we arrived at what was called the Snake River Fall, but I believe is called Shoshone Falls now. We went into camp near and opposite to the Falls. Most of our company were much better. My mother seemed as well as she had since father's death, but in the night my sister woke up and found mother had passed to the Great Beyond. I believe today that if any person ever died of a broken heart, it was my mother, and why shouldn't she? We laid by the next day, and the next night a grave was dug at the right hand of the trail opposite the south end of the falls and near the trail. A vault was dug in the bottom of the grave. She was dressed in her usual wearing apparel and then wound in blankets and placed in the vault without any kind of a casket or box, but was covered over with boards from goods boxes out of the wagon; the dirt was put back, well pressed down until the grave was full. The rest of the dirt was carried and poured into the river and a fire built on the grave and the next morning the entire train was driven over the grave to conceal it from the Indians. This is the last date that I shall be able to give. My sister entered the death of my mother in the Bible thus: Rebecca Hockett; died, August the 27th, 1847. Only five days before my father had been laid away in an unmarked grave without

shroud or casket. How my sister escaped a nervous collapse is more than I have ever been able to understand; out in the wilds with three little brothers and one a baby.

On the morning of August 28th we started on our onward march, Ft. Hall being our objective point where we would strike the Whitman trail again. Some three or four days after this where we stopped to let the stock rest and feed near the bank of the river, on the opposite side of the river there was a great spring gushing out of the side of the mountain, forming a cataract that rushed down to the river. J. M. Robinson, my uncle and others went to the river to get a better view of it. Robinson concluded he would swim across the river to get a still better view of it. He miscalculated the force of the current. It carried him down into the cold water; he took the cramp as soon as he was carried into the cold water and sunk to rise no more. It was useless to try to recover his body, as the river at this point formed a series of rapids and falls. I never knew who he was or where he was from. He had no family; was very popular with the whole company. He and my uncle were the best of friends. It was he who was with my uncle when robbed by the Indians. When anyone was sick he would drive their team, and was universally respected. My sister told me he was a born leader and was welcome at mess time with any. No one would have been missed more.

At this time Oregon Territory included both what is now Washington and Oregon, but as we were bound for the Willamette Valley, we always thought of that when we spoke of Oregon. I am not without chart or compass.

I know nothing more of the trip, only what my elders have told me, except that I was taken sick of that dreaded fever at the grand rounds. I had been very sick all day and when we

struck camp my sister brought me some tea and said she thought I was taking the measles. I was told that the company who waited with our Salem company was kind and loyal, but poorly supplied with provisions. From all accounts our Salem people were as well provided for as almost any who ever crossed the plains, good wagons, the best of teams and a surplus of provisions. Many wagons had to be left. Some cut their wagon boxes in two and made carts.

I know but little of the hardships of the trip to Ft. Hall, but I have been told that the road from Ft. Hall was the roughest of the whole trip. We struck the Whitman trail at Ft. Hall and stayed on it. I don't know what time of the year it was now, but it must have been the early part of October. We kept to the Whitman trail to Ft. Walla Walla. Were now in the Cayuse Indian country and there was great fear of an uprising, as a great many of them had the measles. Many had died and they blamed the white people. Certain it is that we did not reach Walla Walla until after the rainy season set in and it must have been in November when we reached the Columbia River. My uncle and sister sold our ox wagons and what few cows and heifers we got through, to the Hudson Bay Company, keeping the faithful mare that we had for a saddle horse and one cow, our beds, bedding, wearing apparel, provisions, etc., and chartered a flat open boat or barge, and loaded our entire belongings on it. The Widow Fisher had ridden in our family wagon since her husband's death, so she and her little girl remained with us, but let her team continue with the company down the Columbia to the Falls. The boat we hired was an open boat. I think this transfer to the boat was decided upon because of my sickness.

How long it took us to make the trip to the Falls I never knew The first I remember after I was taken sick was when we were at the Cascade Falls. They were transferring the boat around

the Falls similar to moving a house. I seemed to awake from a sound sleep. I knew it was raining and my sister was leaning over me. I asked why I was in the rain. She told me it had been raining on us six days and nights, so I think we may have made the trip from Walla Walla in six days and nights. The next thing I was conscious of was that I was hungry and I was hungry from then on, but it was three or four mouths before I could walk as I had lost the use of my lower limbs. My hips and backbone had worn through the skin, but we got safely transferred around the worst of the Falls and the boat launched, reloaded and continued down the Columbia to the mouth of the Willamette where a tow boat took us up to Portland where we arrived December 12, 1847, having been on the road since April 10, 1847, or eight months and two days from Salem.

We were able to get a small log house in Portland to move into and we were once more sheltered from the rain. The great problem was, what were we to do. Father and mother gone, among strangers in a strange land. Portland at that time consisted of a row of houses along the river, with a few shacks back, and was usually called "'String Town." I cannot recall how long we stayed there. There was a small colony formed 16 miles west of Portland on the Tualitin River and we moved out there. An old hunter and trapper by the name of Squire Eberts, who had an Indian woman of the Blackfoot Tribe for a wife, gave us the free use of a log house of his to live in. His partner, Bill Wilkinson, lived near him. His wife was an Indian woman from the same tribe, and no one could have been more kind or more helpful to us than these rough men of the mountains. Not very long after we landed at Portland the rest of the Salem people came. They got as far as the Falls and for some reason could get no further with wagons. I think they were

blockaded by snow in the Cascade Mountains. At any rate, they sold wagons and stock and came by water to Portland. Mrs. Lewelling and Spicer Teas, the young man who had been teamster for them, were both sick and died soon after they got through, making in all five of our Salem people who had died.

Soon after we moved out and joined the Tualitin Colony Governor Abernethy called for 500 volunteers to go to Northern Oregon to try to suppress the uprising of the Cayuse Indians who had murdered Dr. and Mrs. Whitman and twelve of their missionaries and had taken I think, forty-two prisoners, mostly women and children. Whitman's mission was near Ft. Wal-la-la, what is now Washington. The name of the mission was Waiilatpu. My uncle, Squire Eberts and Bill Wilkinson volunteered, and we now felt very lonely.

I could never see how my uncle could go off and leave us as he did. Our two old mountaineers also went, and it seemed we were just left alone in the world. My sister had about $1,200.00 in gold, the faithful mare and one cow, but soon after an administrator was appointed and everything was taken possession of and sold, even my parents' clothing and books. My sister had to buy the family Bible to keep it from passing into the hands of strangers, but some way, I never knew how, my sister kept the $1,200.00 in gold. I never knew of it until she sent my share to me when I became 21-years-old. My sister was appointed guardian for us children. She found a home for me with one Jacob Reed and they were as good to me as anyone could have been.

The gold mines had been discovered in California and nearly everybody was aiming to go. My oldest brother found a home with a man by the name of Magee. This was late in the fall of '48. We had not heard from my uncle and supposed he had been killed in the Cayuse War.

About the 1st of March, 1849, Mr. Reed moved to California and took me with him. That was the last I knew of my folks until in the summer of 1850. Mr. Reed returned from California and brought me back with him. I then learned that my sister had married and gone to California, that my brother was also in California and that my uncle, Wilkinson and Eberts had been dispatched to St. Joseph, Missouri, after government troops; that in the fall of '48 Wilkinson and Eberts had piloted the troops back; that my uncle had gone home, got one of his brothers and had crossed the plains in '49 to California and expected to take us children back home when they went. In the fall of 1850 they found the other children in California and brought them back to Oregon where we were all together again but my sister would not return to Iowa, neither would she let my little brother come.

In the spring in 1851 my uncle made preparations to return to Iowa, and about March 1st we took passage on the steamship Columbus for San Francisco and there we unfortunately took passage on the steamship McKim, an old vessel that had been condemned by the government and had been re-painted and stole out with 450 passengers bound for Panama which we should have reached in ten days. After we had been out four or five days we encountered an awful storm. The vessel sprung a leak and filled with water until the fires were put out and the steam pumps stopped. The pumps had to be run then by details from the passengers. It took 24 men at a time to run the pumps. Everything possible was thrown overboard to lighten the ship. We drifted for two weeks with a north wind. By this time we were south of the equator and out of provisions and fresh water, were allowanced on a pint of bean soup and a pint of water a day for a week, and then cut down to one-half pint of soup and one-half pint of water. Here was where I

met with the greatest suffering of my life, The weather untimely hot, with half a pint of stagnant water every 24 hours, with our lips swollen and our tongues parched and cracked open, but the carpenters finally got repairs made, the fires rekindled, the steam pumps started and we made our way back to Acapulco and there took on flour and fresh water and arrived at Panama after having been out 36 days from San Francisco. We crossed the Isthmus of Panama on donkeys and shipped on the steamship City of Mexico for New Orleans, and there took a river boat for Keokuk and arrived at Salem, Iowa, May 21, 1851.

So far as I know my young brother and I are all that are alive now of this company. My brother lives at Eugene, Oregon. My sister died in 1858 in Oregon. My oldest brother died in N. E. Washington in 1906. My uncle was out buying sheep in Jefferson County, Iowa, near Fairfield, and just sunk out of sight. The last time he was ever seen that we know of was on July 3rd, 1857. He was twelve miles from Fairfield. Said he intended to spend the 4th with his family in Fairfield. Many thought he was drowned, as the water courses were very high, and he told the last man he was known to talk with that he was going to Fairfield that day if he had to swim.

(signed) W. A. Hockett

April 10, 1914