

THE FIRST OVERLAND MAIL BAG TO CALIFORNIA.

Bancroft Library

The 8th of March, 1848, my father with four sons started from Mississippi overland for Oregon. He had been teaching school for twenty-five years, and being somewhat broken in health, thought that he would take a vacation of a few years, and after having corresponded with some of the prominent pioneers of Oregon, concluded that the trip to that territory would give him the required rest and be a good practical outdoor schooling for his boys. Arriving at Independence, Mo., about the 1st of April (which was then the outfitting point for Oregon and California), he remained until the 8th of May, procuring his outfit. While so doing he had become acquainted with the Postmaster at that place. He (the Postmaster) told him that there had accumulated in the office about 300 letters for Oregon and there was no regular postal route to that country, and wanted to know if he would take them, if permission could be procured from the postal authorities. As there would be but little weight, he consented to the proposition, on condition that he should be authorized to collect the regular postage (which was 40¢ at that time, and very few of any were prepaid, as the postal laws at that time did not require prepayment, also any additional amount that the parties were willing to pay). The Postmaster got permission of the authorities at Washington to deliver them to him, as there was no other way to get them to their destination. They were placed in a canvas mail bag, such as we use now for papers, tied with a strong string and delivered to him. Our outfit having been procured,

(consisting of two wagons and ox teams), we started on the 4th day of May for Oregon. I do not know, but think that was the first and last regular mail that was ever dispatched in the United States by ox teams. It most certainly was, for such a long distance. Our train consisted of 36 wagons, 23 or 24 families, and my recollection is about sixty of the company were capable of bearing arms. All of the trains for Oregon had started before we were ready, and as there were only about 8 families who wished to go to that Territory, we joined a company for California, Jo Childs, of Napa Valley, Cal., being their captain, or leader. He had made two former trips to California and was well acquainted with the road, camping places, etc. It was necessary at that time to have a leader who was somewhat acquainted with the country and Indian character. All were expected to defer to his advice and direction. We had no serious trouble with the Indians. There were but few very savage tribes then, and let me say right here that if crossed they would steal from us and occasionally kill some of our cattle at night, even when under guard, as they used only bow and arrow at that time, so could shoot them at night without noise. The Siouxs were friendly, but levied tribute by requiring us to pay it in the way of beads, provisions, etc. As our Captain knew when we were in the vicinity of savage Indians, he always required double guards at night, and as every man and boy was well armed and always ready at a moment's notice, we were never molested, but were several times very nervous, as Indians would build their signal fires in the mountains and we would occasionally see them over the brow of a hill. At one time we saw a [cloud?] dust approaching, and presently men on horseback

riding speedily. All got their arms in readiness, but soon with his field glass the Captain made out that they were friends. As they approached, Childs recognized Colonel Fremont and Kit Carson, with whom he was acquainted. My recollection is that the Company numbered about sixty. They camped with us one night and then sped on, as theirs was a pack train and could make better time. I could give many incidents, but am digressing. Arriving at Fort Hall, we heard that the Snake Indians were on the warpath and had attacked emigrant trains and settlers, and as we were but a handful that wanted to go to Oregon, concluded to keep on to California with the main train, and it is well that we did so, or assuredly we would have been murdered. While traveling down the Humboldt (or Mary's River as it was then called), we met and camped with a party of mormons on their way from California to Salt Lake. There we received our first news of the discovery of gold in California and its fabulous wealth. Of course we thought that it was greatly exaggerated, but when we arrived at the mines we found that "the half had not been told". However, we did not accelerate our speed. Our teams were becoming faded and undue haste would probably leave us to make the last part of our journey by foot. We arrived at the foot of the Sierras about the middle of September, and as the weather looked somewhat threatening and the fate of the Donner party being fresh in our memory, we began to get quite nervous and uneasy; 6 or 8 inches of snow meant delay and probably death by cold and starvation, as our provisions were getting low. However, we arrived at Ringold, two miles from Placerville, on the 4th of October, just four days short of six months from the time we left the Missouri River. In 1848,

paid list business list
mail 5 months by ox team from the Missouri River; 1893, the same
by rail in less than 4 days. Now, for the distribution of the mail.
We found, as it seemed, about one-half of the able-bodied men from
Oregon in the mines. We let it be known, by word of mouth (for
there were no newspapers at that time in the mining section) that we
had the Oregon mail in our tent. It was but a few days until they
began to call for their mail. But few were disappointed in getting
a letter or letters for themselves or friends. We let the first
ones set the price that they were willing to pay. They set it at
\$2 per letter. I remember that one man got 8 letters and paid \$10.
There was not a man that ever made any complaint about the price.
In fact, for several years messengers made regular trips to Sacra-
mento and brought letters to the mines at \$2 apiece. In 1851 men
made a business of getting in line at the Postoffice and take the
chance of selling their place to some one when they got near the win-
dow. If they did not sell, they had a list ^{*prepared (?)*} ~~from~~ *that*
was worth more than money to some. This mail from the East only
arrived twice a month, and it was only for a few days that there was
such a rush. I have known men to pay \$16 for a place near the win-
dow. It may be asked why the messengers continued in the business
so long after there were mail routes to the mines -- simply because
it had become a business, and many letters were addressed to Sacra-
mento instead of the mining camps and men had rather pay the \$2 to
have them brought to their camp than to write and have them sent to
the nearest office. What letters were not called for, we kept for
over a year, until there was no further inquiry. I then constitut-
ed myself a dead-letter office. As there was nothing more valuable

First Overland Mail Bag
to California

mail 5 months from the Missouri River; 1893, the same
by rail in less than 4 days. Now, for the distribution of the mail.
We found, as it seemed, about one-half of the able-bodied men from
Oregon in the mines. We let it be known, by word of mouth (for
there were no newspapers at that time in the mining section) that we
had the Oregon mail in our tent. It was but a few days until they
began to call for their mail. But few were disappointed in getting
a letter or letters for themselves or friends. We let the first
ones set the price that they were willing to pay. They set it at
\$2 per letter. I remember that one man got 8 letters and paid \$16.
There was not a man that ever made any complaint about the price.
In fact, for several years messengers made regular trips to Butte-
mont and brought letters to the mines at \$2 apiece. In 1881 men
made a business of getting in line at the Postoffice and take the
chance of selling their place to some one when they got near the win-
dow. If they did not sell, they had a list from
was worth more than money to some. This mail from the West only
arrived twice a month, and it was only for a few days that there was
such a rush. I have known men to pay \$16 for a place near the win-
dow. It may be asked why the messengers continued in the business
so long after there were mail routes to the mines -- simply because
it had become a business, and many letters were addressed to Butte-
mont instead of the mining camps and men had rather pay the \$2 to
have them brought to their camp than to write and have them sent to
the nearest office. What letters were not called for, we kept for
over a year, until there was no further inquiry. I then consti-
tuted myself a dead-letter office. As there was nothing more valuable

or interesting than samples of the last of some of the
family, I consigned them to the *flames* .

Thos. S. Bayley. Bancroft Library

PAPERS OF THOMAS S. BAYLEY:

RECOLLECTIONS OF CALIFORNIA DURING THE GOLD RUSH.

(Presented to the Bancroft Library by Mrs. Williamita
B. Callow, 1528 McGee Ave., Berkeley. These are
recollections of her paternal grandfather)

(Transcripts gift of Mrs. Guy L. Bayley, June 6, 1949)

C-D
5011
7 folders.

The First Overland Mail Bag to California

Bancroft Library

The 8th of March 1848 my father
with four sons started from Mississippi
overland for Oregon. He had been
teaching school for 25 yrs. and being
somewhat broken in health thought
that he would take a vacation
of a few years. And after consulting
corresponded with ~~James~~ ~~James~~ and other
prominent business of Oregon. Concluded
that the trip to that Territory would
give him the required rest and be
a good for his outdoor schooling
for his boys arriving at Independence
about the 1st of May. (Which was then the only fitting point
for Oregon & Cal.) he remained ~~at~~
until the 8th of May, procuring his outfit
while so doing. I had become acquainted
with the S.M. at that place. He (the S.M.)
told him that there had been a rental
in the diff. about 300 letters for
Oregon and there was no other

was even dispatched in the h. s. by
 last terms. It most certainly was, for
 such a long distance, Our train
 Consisted of 34 wagons. 23 or 4 families
 and my recollection is about 60 of the
 Company were capable of bearing arms
 All of the trains for Oregon had started
 before we were ready. And as there
 were only about 8 families who wished
 to go to that ter. we joined a company
 for out go. Childs of Mupa Valley Cal
 being their Captain or leader. We
 had made two former trips to
 Cal and was well acquainted with
 the road, camping places &c. It was
 necessary at that time to have a
 leader that was somewhat acquainted
 with the country and Indian customs
 And all were expected to defer to
 his advice, and direction. He had
 no serious trouble with the Indians

There were but few very savage
 tribes there, ^{but one says right here that if} they would steal from
 us and occasionally kill some of our
 cattle at night - even when under guard
 as they used only bows & arrow at that
 time they could shoot them at night without
 noise. The Sioux were friendly, but
 demanded tribute by requiring us to pay
~~tribute~~ ^{it} in the way of beads provisions &c.
 It is our Captain knew when we were in
 the vicinity of Savage Indians. He always
 required double guards at night. And
 as every man and boy was well armed
 and always ready at a moment's notice
 we were never molested. But were
 several times very nervous, as Indians
 would build their signal fires on
 the mountains and we would occa-
 sionally see them over the brow of
 a hill. At one time we saw a great
 dust approaching, and presently were
 on horseback riding rapidly. All got
 their arms in readiness, but soon

with his ^{field} glass, the Captain made out
 that they were friends. As they approached
 Childs recognized but Burnet and Kit Carson
 with whom he was acquainted. My recollection
 is that there is numbered about 60. They
 camped with us one night, and then
 sped on, as there was a pack train
 and could make better time, I could
 give many incidents but am deterred.
 Arriving at Fort Hall. He heard that
 the Snake Indians were on the war
 path, and had attacked emigrant-trains
 and settlers. And as we were but a
 handful that wanted to go to Oregon,
 concluded to keep on to Ore with the
 main train, and it is well that
 we did so or undoubtedly we would
 have been murdered. While traveling
 down the Humboldt, (or Marys River as it was
 then called) we met and camped with
 a party of Mexicans, on the way from

Cal to Salt Lake, Thence we heard the
 our first news of the discovery of gold
 in Cal and its fabulous wealth. Of course
 we thought that it was greatly exaggerated
 But when we arrived at the mines we
 found that the talk had not been told
 However we did not accelerate our
 speed, our teams were becoming faded
 and in due haste would probably leave
 us to make the last part of our journey
 foot. We arrived at the foot of the
 Sierras about the middle of September
 and as the weather looked somewhat
 threatening, and the fate of the Donner
 party being fresh in our memory
 we began to feel some great delay and by all
 means to get quite nervous and
 death by gold & starvation, as our provisions were
 meagre. However we arrived at Salt Lake
 Ringgold two miles from Phenixville
 on the 4th of October, just 4 days short
 of six months from the time we left
 the Missouri river. 1848 We 8 made 500
 by 40 team ^{from the Missouri R} 1893 the same by rail in less
 than 4 days. Now for the distribution of
 1-1-1-1

the mail, He found, as it seemed
 about one half of the able bodied ~~men~~
~~men~~ ^{men} were on the mines. He let it
 be known, by word of mouth (for there
 were no newspapers at that time in
 the mining section) that we had the
 Oregon mail in our tent. It was but
 a few days until they began to call
 for their mail but few were dis-
 appointed in getting a letter or letters
 for themselves or friends. He let the
 ones set the price that they
 willing to pay. They set it at \$2.00
 letter. I remember that one man ^{got a letter for \$1.00}
 there was one man that ^{never}
 made any complaint about the price.
 In fact for several years, messengers made
 regular trips to Sacramento and brought
 letters to the mines at \$2.00 apiece. In 1851
 one made a business of getting in line
 at the P.O. and take the chance of selling
 their place to some one where they
 got near the window. ^{so they did not sell they had a list before}
 was worth
 more than money to some. He made

from the East only arrived twice
 a month and it was only for
 a few days that there was such
 a rush. I have known men to pay
 \$16.00 for a place near the window.
 It may be asked why the messengers
 continued in the business so long after
 there were good routes to the mines
 simply because it had become a
 business, and many letters were
 addressed to Sac instead of the
 mining camps, and men had rather
 pay the \$2.00 to have them brought to
 their camp than to write and
 have them sent to the nearest
 office, that letters were not called
 for me kept for over a year until
 there was no further inquiry. I then
 constituted myself a dead letter office,
 as there was nothing more valuable
 or interesting than scraps of the last-
 chers of some of the family. I con-
 signed them to the flames,
 Thos. S. Knight