

File Denny  
JOURNALS

COVERED WAGON DAYS

----- Alice Denney Brown

Edited by Monica McCormick Comber

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January 4, 1849

Miss Berrilla F. King of Bethel, Indiana, and Thomas H. Denney of Condord Indiana, were married Thursday afternoon at the bride's home. Rev. John B. New of North Vernon Christian Church performed the ceremony. The wedding was witnessed by a large circle of friends and relatives and was followed by a bounteous wedding dinner, after which a social time and games were played.

## COVERED WAGON DAYS

Their friends and relatives inquired as to where they intended to begin housekeeping.

"In Oregon," they answered.

"Oh, Shaw! you don't mean that? Surely you can't go away out there among the wild Indians."

Many jokes and fun were passed around about the trip to Oregon.

Tom said, "You wait until this Indiana cold weather breaks and a few nice warm days come and you will see us preparing for the trip. Many of you will be wanting to go to Oregon."

"Berrilla", a friend said, "Let Tom go out there first and locate. When he is settled, you go there or let him return for you."

Berrilla replied, "No, we will go together."

"Why go away out there when there is plenty of good land in Indiana", persisted the friend.

"Yes", continued Berrilla, "I know there is, but I want to see a real mountain, one covered with snow, a big Tall pine tree and, the Pacific Ocean."

Failing to discourage her, the friend concluded, "I expect the Indians will get you; better not go."

During the summer of 1848, Berrilla was very busy drying peaches, apples and corn. She did a great deal of weaving in order to have material enough to last two years or until they could make new looms in Oregon.

The winter of 1848 and 1849 was very cold in Indiana and spring was late in coming. The last of February brought a thaw, followed by another hard freeze causing the roads to be soft and almost impassible.

The Denney's had set the 10th of March to start and regardless of bad weather, kept making preparations for the long trip.

By this time, Thomas' unmarried brother and sister, Robert and Rebecca, decided they would accompany them on their western journey. Others in their immediate party were Thomas' cousins, Dr. John L. Hicklin, James Hicklin, their sister Elizabeth, more familiarly known as "Betsy", and their nephew Felix. They had for some time been waiting for a train west so they could join their sister Mrs. Hugh Gordon, who had been writing flattering letters of the Oregon climate and country. Mrs. Gordon had crossed the plains in '45.

The 9th of March arrived balmy and warm. The time was near that they had set to start. A couple of weeks before, their friends had given them a farewell. So to avoid another heartfelt good-bye, with baggage all packed, they started very early, almost before daylight, March 10, but the word had been passed around and when they arrived at the place to take the train for Madison, their friends and relatives were already there to bid them another adieu. They refused to be daunted and waved and called "You will be taking the trail next year, or the next, for Oregon." This was their real home leaving.

At Madison, Indiana, on the Ohio river, they took the steamboat "Spirit of St. Louis" for St. Louis, Missouri. In St. Louis they purchased more supplies that they expected to live on while making the trip. When they had purchased what they felt they must have, two weeks had passed when again they shopped up the Missouri river to Independence, Missouri. They enjoyed their steamboat travel very much. At Independence they would have to buy their teams, wagons, tents and all of the equipment for the long 2000 mile trip.

Independence, Missouri, had been only a best landing on the west side of the Missouri river until it became the starting place of the vast immigration to the West and suddenly found it was the out-post for selling supplies to the immigrants.

It was a cold March evening when they left the boat, the rain was pouring down. The town, what there was of it, was almost a mile from the landing.

Darkies driving wagons drawn by oxen met the boat at the landing.

Two wagons drawn by oxen hauled their baggage, with the women of their party sitting on top of the baggage in the rain. The mud was knee deep to the oxen. Two darkies walked and drove.

Rebecca said, "If I thought all of the way to Oregon would be as bad as this I would go back home from here." None of the others spoke.

The darkies drove the wagons to a large open shed and unloaded their baggage. Thomas had started as soon as the boat landed to hunt for accommodations but there were so many ahead of him he was almost in despair of finding a place when he met a young darkie that said, "I think my 'Maasa will take you in, at least give you shelter for the night." The best his 'Maasa could do was to let them have an unfinished hall above his store. Thus they moved into the shelter, cold, wet and hungry and prepared what supper they could over an open fire in the yard. The next day they put up a buck stove they had bought in St. Louis and cooked on it until they landed in Oregon. The next day they started to buy their wagons, teams and tents. Cattle, mules and horses had been brought to Independence to sell to the immigrants.

The wagons had to be prepared for the long trip. They were large and strong. The bodies of the wagons were wide and deep and were bowed up at each end. The bottom and sides were chinked tight with tarred rope so as not to leak when fording the deep streams encountered on the long journey across the plains.

They had met, since they had come to Independence, several families also preparing for the trip to Oregon. They were from Kentucky and Tennessee and included the Glovers; Graves; Bruncks; and the Talbots'; the latter were from farther east. They became very good friends and hoped they could travel near together on the plains.

Six weeks had passed since Berrilla and Thomas had left their home in Indiana.

At last they were all ready; four yoke of oxen hitched to the heavy covered wagons. The covers of the wagons were heavy canvas drawn over bows and could be closed both front and back but were equipped in the front with a flap that could be turned back so the ones riding in the wagon could see out. The Denneys' and Hicklins' had a partnership tent which was treated so as not to leak; the wagons were fixed to sleep in.

There were four yoke of oxen hitched to the wagon.

At last with wagons loaded almost too heavily, Berille and Rebecca were helped into the Denney's wagon. The Hicklins' were also ready and with the drivers walking at the side of their teams, with about seven other families, they left Independence to join the caravan which had camped out on a small stream about twelve miles from Independence to wait for other wagons to come before they organized and chose a leader for their train.

All that day and the next more wagons kept coming in and joining their train. The third day they were there Mr. Gibson was chosen Captain. He was from Kentucky and had had some plainsmen experience.

The next morning they broke camp; Capt. Gibson riding horseback in the lead. All the wagons in their train were drawn by oxen. The milk cows and loose stock were drove back of the wagons by men on saddle horses. There were only a few horses in the train and they were used to ride.

The first night, camp was made on a small creek named Willow Creek and this was their first experience in corralling the stock. To make a corral the wagons were driven off the trail, one behind the other to form a loop. The teams were then unhitched and the tongue of each wagon rested on the back of the one just in front of it. Then some were placed so as to close the front end thus making a corral of wagons large enough to hold their stock overnight. As soon as the oxen were unyoked men took them some distance from the trail where they could pasture and have water until dark, then brought them back and put them in the corral of wagons.

Two men took their turns at standing guard. They always changed at midnight and guards that came on duty then were on duty until the oxen were taken out to graze in the morning.

Until then they had not any particular place in the train. Mr. Glover spoke up and said "I want to go first as we have good teams and three wagons." Capt. Gibson said he wanted the best teams in front so if the slower ones had to have help they could go back and not stop the whole train.

The Brunks', Glovers', Denneys', Hicklins', McClivers", Talbotts' and the later arrivals all kept their same places until they reached Ft. Hall.

The Glover family had a darkie with them that had been their slave when they left home but of course he was as free a man when they got out on the plains as anyone. His name was "Dunk". He was kind and accommodating and helped greatly around camp where wood and water had to be brought some times from quite a distance. He was loved by the little children and was a favorite with all.

The warm spring was here and their way was through beautiful rolling prairies with green grass and beautiful wild flowers.

They had found that their loads were too heavy and had to leave some of their things by the wayside; all their furniture but two chairs.

Since they had left Willow Creek the way to California and the way to Oregon had followed the same trail. The news of the finding of gold in California had reached them; the news was brought them by a mule train that had caught up and passed them going to California. It created great excitement in their train. Some wanted to switch to the California route. They took a vote and the majority of their train wanted to keep on to Oregon.

Trains made up mostly of men driving mules and horses passed them. Then one night a train passed that they did not see, it was so dark. As they went by someone called out, "To California or bust." One train of only twelve wagons passed them; they were mostly men and the wagon that was last was driven by a little Irishman. He had three mules and an ox harnessed up; one of his mules had been killed so he had bought an ox as he could not get another mule. His wife and four small children were along.



The trail now forked the Santa Fe, heading southwest to California, and the Oregon Trail northwest along Little Blue River. They travelled on Little Blue River several days until they struck the Platt Valley.

They had been travelling for several days in the Platt Valley when they saw their first buffalo herd. It was getting late in the afternoon and the long herd of buffalo were well across the trail when they got near them so they did not have to stop on the account of the herd.

The Trail now lay along the Platt River; they crossed it many times. The Platt River seemed to run along on top of the ground; it was wide and the banks low.

They had now discovered that they still were loaded too heavily. Their leader said on account of their teams they must discard all of weight they could. So bags were made and provisions taken from boxes and chests which were discarded. Some flour and bacon also had to be left on the trail.

Near the forks of the Platt a second trail led to California. The Oregon trail followed the south fork for a short distance then turned northwest and reached the north fork.

Here they encountered a very large herd of buffalo moving north. It was in the morning and the herd was so long that while the center of the herd was passing they could not see the head of the line or the ones at the back. It took two hours for the buffalos to pass. It was feared the cattle would stampede so they corralled for that day.

The next day they came near an Indian village. Lots of the In-

dians came out to see them and brought buffalo hides to trade and would trade them for almost anything. Thomas traded a shirt for one and Rebecca traded a piece of calico for a robe. The Indians were very friendly and acted as though they wanted to show off. The Chief-tain's daughter was riding a white pony with two bells on it. She was dressed in a tanned elk skin and looked very proud. When the Indians rode amongst the loose stock the Captain told them to "Clattawa high yeu, clattawa"; they rode away.

The days were now the longest of the year making daylight last till late in the evening. The little caravan had many pleasing gatherings, signing and talking; the younger ones playing games. Mr. Crow had a violin which he played and the music was enjoyed very much.

They had rested every Sunday, met together and held religious services. They were now travelling toward Ft. Laramie which was the last post on the eastern side of the Rockies. They were travelling now on the up-grade.

One evening Rebecca said, "Berrille, there is your tall pine tree."

"Yes, Beckey, I have already seen it and after supper won't you go with Thomas and me, I want to be close to it and it is not far from the trail."

Beckey said, "You and Tom go on, there will be lots of pine trees to see before we get to Oregon."

When they started the sun was high but the distance was much farther than they had expected and when they reached the pine tree the sun had already set. A beautiful moon had risen and as they walked back Thomas said, "Isn't that a glorious moon."

Berrilla said, "The most beautiful I have ever seen, I wonder if--", then did not finish the sentence. They were wondering if the loved ones in their dear Indiana home were looking at the same moon.

When they reached camp all was still. The camp had retired for the night.

They were near Independence Rock. That was the most famous and noteworthy feature on the trail and marked the half-way as to miles. One side of the rock was almost covered with names. They had tried to reach there by the 4th of July but were a few days late. They camped on Sweet Water, four miles from Independence Rock. The trail now lay along Green River towards what was called the South Pass in the mountains. They had come to snow and had snow balling fights but that soon got to be old.

Steep, rocky and dangerous was the Pass. In places only few inches wider than the wagons; some places a rock wall on one side, the river on the other. Then again, just a rocky backbone with a canyon on either side.

Practically everyone walked that was able. A near tragedy was averted on one of the high narrow places by the quick action of one of the drivers. The driver says that the oxen were crowding each other and would push themselves off the narrow strip of road. When he says that the team was going to fall, he pulled the lynch pin and let them go. Two yoke of oxen fell in the river but the wagon was left standing in the road. A woman and two small children were in the wagon; the oxen were pulled out of the river and not hurt.

Coming down the west side of the Rockies was much harder.

Ft. Bridges was the first place they rested, on the west side

of the Rockies. Wagons had to be repaired and the oxen feet had become so worn and tender they had to be shod; several days were taken up this way.

The way was now northwest towards Bear River and here they had their real Indian scare. The Indians had been seen skulking around the night before and in the morning just after they had started, it was hardly good daylight, the Indians came on their ponies; war paint and feathers. The train stopped and corralled their stock. The Captain told each man who had a gun to take his place at the end of his wagon and for the women all to get in the wagons and for each one to have her best weapon already in her hand and to be sure to use it if needed and to sit low and not scream. Then the covers were tied down tight. Berrilla had a long knife, very heavy with both sides sharp. Rebecca had the little camp axe.

The Indians came up with their ponies on the run (approximately 100 of them) gave a blood-curdling whoop, circled around. The Indians seemed to think the train was too strong and slipped away. Evidently they had expected to stampede the teams and loose stock. Then the train would be at their mercy. When they again opened the wagon covers Felix Hicklin said, "Berrilla, I'm mighty glad I'm not an Indian. You and Beckey sure look dangerous." Not a shot had been fired by the tension had been so great they did not move on till the next day.

There were many things of interest on the trail now if they had not been too weary to look at them or feel an interest in wonders. Chimney Rock looked as though some giant had made it then got disgusted and left it. Steamboat Spring, Jack-in-th-box and Looking Glass Springs; they were all wonderful but the tired eyes did not care much for wonders

but years after seemed glad they had seen them.

Game was plentiful but had to be sought back from the trail. Thomas Demney was a good whot, had a good gun and was a successful hunter. The Captain would often say, "Tom, take my horse and go out and get us game. I'll see that someone does your guard duty. The train will meet you at the ford or bend of the river." As the case may be it was rare he did not bring back venison or antelope and the fresh meat was very much appreciated.

Once when Thomas had started in the early afternoon he had trouble in finding the amount of game so swam the river as he felt sure the trail bore off that way. He killed two deer. When he was ready to start to head off the train he soon found that the river had made a bend and that he would have to swim his horse back and he was probably a good many miles from the trail as he had gone in an opposite direction from what they had when he came to the river. What to do with the deer. He did not want to give them up so he took his lariat and tied to the deer and let them drag through the water. They seemed so wet and heavy he thought it best to dress them. It took longer than he thought. When he got in sight of camp he saw a light; he hoped no one was sick. When he got close he could see Berrilla was sitting up in the wagon holding a candle in case he might miss the trail. It was 3:00 in the morning.

When they had left the big bend in Bear River they headed directly for Ft. Hall. On the East side of the Rockies the grass was green and it had rained so as to keep it from getting very dusty. It had been a cool summer but on the west side of the mountains the sun seemed to just fairly scorch them. It was so dry and the dust was so full of

alkali it swelled their lips and peeled the skin from their faces. Reaching Ft. Hall was an epoch in the trip. When they left Independence they felt as if the trip would be about over when they would reach Ft. Hall. All of the women did knitting on the trail. Most of them had families which needed the sox. Elizabeth Hicklin had 30 pair to sell to the soldiers at Ft. Hall.

Capt. Gibson was to go only as far as Ft. Hall with them. Soon they found that the hardest part was yet to come. Mr. Clemmor met them at Ft. Hall; he scolded them soundly for the way they had loitered on the way, said they should have been there a month or three weeks earlier. It had been four months since they had left Independence and they were very apt to get caught snow before they would reach the valley. He also said their loads were too heavy and insisted that they leave household things and said he had seen women and children wading in the snow and the teams not even able to pull the wagons.

Their train was joined at Ft. Hall by some immigrants that had arrived there earlier but had lost their teams and had wintered there. Among the ones who joined their train were the Albert Kelly family, also some soldiers going to Walla Walla. This was the furthest outpost of civilization.

The trail closely followed the Snake River for a long distance passing many falls, crossing and recrossing the Snake. It was a particularly dangerous river to ford. The Burnt River was the most dangerous piece of road on the entire trail. The trail was in a canyon and was dry and rocky and it cost them one of their teams. Many of the others in the train lost so many oxen that the last half

day in the canyon they had to double up teams, pull one wagon out then go back and get another. They made three miles in one day but felt they had given all the strength they had.

The trail wended it way among hills, sand and rock with, water scarce and alkali plentiful. Many of the train lost oxen from the alkali. One night while in this region an ox came up to them on the outside of the corral, his hair was mostly gone. They decided he had belonged to a train ahead of theirs and had alkali and been turned out to die but had got well, had seen their cattle and came to them. They took him in and gave him his passage the rest of the way.

Cholera had hit the train but the cases had been very light. Dr. Hicklin had been very successful treating them and not one were fatal or even very serious until now. Robert Denney was taken sick in the night and by morning was almost unconscious. Thomas Denney went to the leader, Mr. Clemmons and told him that Robert was very sick and was not able to be moved. Mr. Clemmons asked if he wanted to hold up the whole train. Thomas said it was up to the train, but their wagons would stop until he was better.

Clemmons said, "I would like to know how other feel about stopping."

Dr. Hicklin said, "I count we had better go on."

Thomas said, "The train must do as they think best but our wagons will stay here until Bob is better and Dr. Hicklin will stay, we have pulled him out of too many bad places since we left Indiana. I 'count he had better pull Robert out."

Mr. Glover heard the talk and he said, "We will not turn a wheel until he is better." So it was decided not to go on that day but to make up the time by travelling on Sunday.

The nexy morning Robert was much better; it was Sunday. As they were getting their team in place Betsy Hicklin said, "Are you going to trail on the Sabbath? Well I never have desecrated the Sabbath and I'll not do it now."

Her brother James said, "Well I 'count it would be a little lonesome to stay here alone."

She took her place in the wagon, opened her Bible and read several chapters. Some of the drivers hearh her and commenced to sing "How Firm A Foundation ysaints of the Lord." When they stoped at noon Betsy said, "You see the men felt about travelling on the Sabbath just as I did." That night they camped on a branch of Powder River and waited until about 4:00 in the evening to start to trail and drove all that night and until evening the next day when they reached North Powder River. The stock has had nothing to drink in the 24 hours. The people had taken what water they could haul but they had such poor containers that they were out before they reached the river and suffered quite a lot from thirst. Some of the stock drank so much after being so tired and warm that they died.

The trail led through Powder Valley coming out at North Powder, through the Grand Ronde Valley and on over the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains were all that their name indicated and seemed a relief after the dry alkali part they had so recently left behind.

Some of the wagons and the soldiers had left the train to go to Ft. Walla Walla. The rest came on toward the Columbia. It was getting late September and there had been quite hard frosts but no bad weather at all. The teams had improved since they had struck the bunch grass. On the Umatilla and John Day Rivers the train



lost some more of their wagons; some would go to the Dalles and down the Columbia in rafts and barges. But our little party wanted to come all the way in their wagons. So the dozen wagons or a few more, were camped on the John Day River. They were very happy that they had come so far and were enjoying an evening much as they had on the first part of the road. As they sat around a small campfire Berrill said, "Do you really think we can reach the Willamette Valley by the middle of October? "

Mr. Clemmons answered, "Oh, yea, the weather is so fine we can cross the Cascades and come out at Youngs and Foster's sooner than that.

On the John Day River, September 23, Thomas' and Berrilla's oldest son was born. He was named for his grandfather Fielding John Denney; they stopped just one day.

The next morning at Daylight Dunk, as usual, was up to make the fires. Thomas was already sitting by the fire. Dunk grabbed his head and said, "Thomas I's so glad."

Mr. Glover stuck his head out and said, "Tom what is it--" but Tom did not answer, but Mr. Hicklin stepped out and said, "It's a boy, but a little ornery one."

Aunt Beckey heard him and came out and said, "That is not so, it is a boy but a fine plucky one and the first Denney grandchild."

Later on in the day when asked when they meant to go on Mr. Clemmons said, "Just when Mrs. Denney feels like she can stand it."

So that day was taken up naming the baby. Beckey said, "Of course he must be a Fielding."

John Z. Hunt

Dr. Hicklin said, "Where do I come in?"

Berrilla said, "We will call him Fielding John."

So the next morning with Fielding John Denney carried in his Aunt Beckey's arms the little train again started on its last lap. The trip across the Cascades was uneventful but very rough. They reached Youngs' place earlier than they expected. After a stay of two weeks at the Youngs' the Denneys' came down to Willes.

The Gordans had met the Hicklins and the Glovers and the rest of the train went further up the valley.

Denney's stayed at Willes a little over a year. While they were there a Mr. Fanno came to see them and said a good section of land adjoined him, wished they would come and see it. Thomas went over and looked it over, thought it a good piece of land and with the help of his brother, Robert and cousin, Felix, made a three roomed log house. Mr. Fanno had visited them several times while they lived at Willes. Thomas and Robert worked in Willes mill and Rebecca taught school. Just before Thanksgiving in 1850 they moved into their new log house on the section donation land claim which was their future home.

*Aunt Beckey's home  
built here in 1850*

*Augustus*

A word about Aunt Beckey. Mr. Fanno was a widower, he had crossed the plains in '46. His wife had passed away leaving him a small son. Mr. Fanno had filed on a section and when he and Aunt Beckey were married in the spring of '51, the half section became hers.

Six more children came to Thomas and Berrilla, all were born on the donation claim and they always made that their home.

The End

Source  
Linda Ford

*Augustus was husband of Linda Ford's  
G. Grandmother, Rebecca.  
Rebecca was widow of OR 1851  
McKay & completed trip w/ Brownlow  
Thomas Mc Kay  
Thomas & Fanno b't 1st sawmill  
in Beaverton & 1st school*

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Susan, the faithful rifle that heaped to protect and feed them while on the long trail to Oregon and also after they had settled in Oregon, is a revered keepsake in winning the West. The rifle was purchased from a Mr. McLaughlin and named after his wife "Susan."

The watch, one of a few in the train and for several years the only time keeper in the home, is still a loved keepsake.

Both Berrilla and Thomas had lost their parents. Berrilla's father passed away when she was a young girl and her mother had followed him nine years later. Berrilla and her sister Almyra, and three brothers, Benjamin, Peter and Cephas had kept house and lived on the farm home that their father had entered from the Government in 1820. Berrilla was born there and she and Thomas were married there.

Thomas was born in Scott County Kentucky, but came to Independence with his parents, when quite young and settled in Jennings County, Indiana. His mother passed away when Thomas was 9. There were 8 children in his family. Thomas was the eldest son and had two older sisters, Mary and Lucy, who were the housekeepers and took care of the younger children, Rebecca, Elizabeth, Aaron and Robert who was the baby.

Before coming to Oregon, Thomas had a saw mill and grist mill on a small creek near Concord. He had run the saw mill for several years and had his home at the mill. When he prepared to go to Oregon he sold the grist mill to his brother-in-law, James Stou, and rented the saw mill to his brother, Aaron and his brother-in-law, James Stou. Thomas wanted to keep his saw mill machinery so he could put a mill up in Oregon. He later sent to Indiana for the machinery and had it

shipped around the Horn. He built a saw mill on Fanno Creek; run by water power. It was an up and down saw and required a large head of water to run it. Many of the early homes in Washington County used lumber from his mill as well as the first school house in Dist. No. 18 and the Aces Chapel M. E. Church. It was the first church built west of Portland or east of Forest Grove or Hillsboro. Also the Butte school house, now Tigard, was built from lumber made in his mill.

Thomas passed away <sup>in 1909</sup> being 91 years, 7 months and 17 days. Had he lived until January 4, 1909, he and Berrilla would have celebrated their 60th wedding Anniversary.

Berrilla passed away September 20, 1912, lacking two months of being 90.

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This is the story of their trip as near as I can write it down-- told to me by my dear Father and Mother.