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APUSH – A2

The Overland Trail West, Chapter 13 Essay

April 2nd , 1849

It was no where I wanted to be, it was everywhere I wanted to be. “Oregon fever” has got a snug hold on my parents. They’ve heard the tales of the opportunity the northwest land has, so had announced we will begin the trek to our new home there. The idea of a journey to a land of paradise has me and my four siblings very anxious, maybe less so then my parents; but my parents have got the fever, so that means we do too.

I am the oldest of my siblings (17 years), and therefore think I have a better understanding of the 2,000 mile, 8 month journey we are about to embark on. As we departed on the 1st of April, many of the husbands and men were a part of a discussion pertaining to our rules and government during the voyage. Those present voted on nine men to take care of any disputes that should arise, one was my father, and the captain is an Arnold Bennet who have been to the Oregon country previously. After we had organized, and it appeared the company had wagons packed we commenced on our journey.

May 3rd

The past month have seen many people fatigued and sick. Already some have been staying in the wagons due to illness, and they can’t escape their beds. Some days we have hiked an excess of 20 miles in the wet and cold. My younger siblings all fatigued and complaining, walk together and all wish they could be back home. It’s a miracle we aren’t all walking naked, because our clothes have been soaked night and day, our beds as well. The rain had turned these open dusty lands to a muddy obstacle course.

The weather seems to want to impair our traveling; in mid-April the wind blew so hard it collapsed two of the wagons. Multiple days it rained unbelievingly hard and with hail. The wind speed was as if a hurricane had hit us, and lightning was present too. Perhaps this drastic weather was the reason some of our oxen were missing the next day. We went out hunting for them, but they were impossible to track. I had been going out on hunting provisions with the rest of the boys routinely, until today when my father left me with my mother at camp. She is sick and claims her feet are numb and have no feeling. All of us hope that the Oregon country is more than just a flattered tale…

July 27th

Our days so far have been dotted with much rain, thunder, and sand. Sometimes so much so it’s hard to see the huge desert lands of the trail in front of us. We had hiked another long 20 plus miles, and the relief is plain on everyone’s face that we have stopped to camp. My baby sister has been lacking in dry clothes, leaving my mother sewing a lot. My youngest brother is milking cattle, my younger brother is setting up a firm tent to hold against rain, and my sister (who is younger) is with my father idling about while we settle in our new camp. We are all assigned different responsibilities, and my mother is responsible for all of us. She has been almost without any rest for the past 4 months. This makes me think of what it must be like for the other mothers along with us responsible for more than 5 children!

August 7th

Today we encountered a tribe of Indians along our route. They were strange and highly curious of us. Some were interesting in our wears and food. A few Indians wanted to trade the beads they wore for our bread. It was a mostly friendly encounter; one lady gave all her cakes to the Indians; though my father’s friend was ripped off in a trade with them. I still remember the gaze an Indian had on our horse and cattle, with envious eyes, he and a few others followed us a bit and we stayed close to the horses until they decided to go back to their village. . .

November 11th

Today I stumbled upon a water bucket, and a cooking pot which had been blown far from our camp the stormy night previously. The weather and environment has left all of us restless and comfortless. Even more people have fallen to illness, and our drenched clothes and beds have not helped. My mother has not been able to change clothes since past October. It is a challenge to keep warm, and I have seen some people walking barefoot now.

The trek is filled with hardship, but we have had one birth now, my mother’s friend gave birth to her seventh child a few days ago, and we had already walked another 40 miles since. Afterwards we loaded the wagons on the flatboat and crossed the Columbia. The horses submerged to their necks, crossing the river, was an awkward sight. It’s remarkable we are still standing at this point, but a few older people’s legs gave out on them over the trek and they are being cared for in the wagons. Our lake of medicines has lead to one death, making one of the wives a widow now.

January 2nd , 1850

A hard decision had to be made regarding the widow and some of her children who fell behind camped out in a shed joined to a family’s house. The nine of our elected council convened, and they had to decide on the question of leaving the widow with the children because there was no longer any room in the cramped wagons during the night. My father, a part of the council, explained to me 7 of 9, not including himself, voted to leave them behind. However the captain, Mr. Bennet, disapproved the motion, being a good friend of the widow, wanting to take her with us. However the council’s majority came upon the same decision, concluding that taking them with us would result in no sleep during the rainy cramped nights.

Therefore, it’s regrettably so we have left the widow and her children in the care of the family. We have also had one more death from a boy who was obviously sick from mal-nutrition and the harsh journey.

February 3rd

Our journey is finally at end. We had crossed the Columbia a last time before our journey ended. The scene of our company crossing the rivers on flatboats, canoes, horses in the water, skiff, wagons, and all is very memorable one. After arriving in the Oregon country, so close to the Pacific, my father immediately traded two of our oxen for a nice acre of land including a portion of a small patch of vegetables. Lucky is no doubt the word for me and my family. We have been shaped clearly physically, none of us shy to the weight loss. My siblings have also changed in the mental aspect, becoming much more grateful and humble in the new house we now own.