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[Overland Trail Lore and Early Life]

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Title Overland trail lore and early life in Oregon

Place of origin Oswego, Oregon Date 1/31/39

Project worker Sara B. Wrenn

Project editor

Remarks Reminiscences

Form A

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Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 31, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Overland Trail Lore and Early Life in Oregon.

Name and address of informant Mrs. J. R. Bean Twin Fir Road, Lake Grove, Oswego, Oregon.

Date and time of interview January 31, 1939 11:00 to 12:00 A.M.

Place of interview Home of informant.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant —

Neighbor of interviewer.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you —

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Comfortable room, rather crowded with the ordinary over-stuffed furniture, with "tidies" and "fancy-work" pillows much in evidence. Many pictures of various sorts, including a number of photographs. The room was heated with a circulating heater. Neat, five-room cottage, surrounded by a garden of the conventional sort — small lawn, shrubbery, and off at one side a trellised pergola, with vines growing over it, and evidence of use as a lounging and eating place in summer months.

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The neighborhood is of the usual suburban type — small houses, not too close together, surrounded by flowers, shrubbery, and trees.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 31, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Overland Trail Lore and Early Life in Oregon.

Name and address of informant Mrs. J. R. Bean Twin Fir Road, Lake Grove, Oswego, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates

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6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

1. Scotch-Welsh-English.

2. Lebanon, Linn. Co., Oregon, January 1, 1866.

3. James Gore, father; Henrietta Berthenia Settle Gore, mother. One daughter.

4. Lebanon, Oregon; Corvallis, Oregon; Portland, Oregon, Oswego (Lake Grove).

5. Public schools only.

6. Housewife, no accomplishments.

7. Special interest and some skill in music — piano. General interest in social and political matters.

8. General community activities. Member of Episcopalian church. Charter member Royal Neighbors of America.

9. An attractive, white-haired and brown-eyed woman of something more than medium height, inclined to plumpness, with the social grace of one who has lived much of her life in a family hotel — as Mrs. Bean has.

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10. Both Mrs. Bean and her husband are descendants of prominent Oregon pioneers.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 3, 1939.

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Overland Trail Lore and Early Life in Oregon.

Name and address of informant Mrs. J. R. Bean Twin Fir Road, Lake Grove, Oswego, Oregon.

Text:

I'm afraid I can't tell you much. If only my mother were living, she could tell you everything about early days in Oregon: but I was the youngest of the family, and some way I have never been interested, until now it is too late.

Yes, of course, I went to camp and revival meetings when I was a girl. They used to have great times down at what was known as Harrisburg Bridge. The people would come from all over the country and camp for days at a time. The Methodists had it in charge. There would be services both in the afternoon and at night. The night services were the ones we young folks, who were not Methodists, would attend, for that was when there was excitement and halleluiahs and amens. Those converting and those being converted

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would get in a high state of emotion, and we youngsters would go home half scared to death, thinking the world was coming to an end without delay.

I went to camp meetings and picnics in the summer, and to dances and spelling schools in the winter. Then there were church and other socials, with lunch baskets, where the gentlemen bought or drew chances by some device for a basket, and the lady who brought it would be his partner when it came to eating.

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I was pretty small when I went to these, going with my father and mother, and I don't remember very much about them, but I do remember one. I was sitting with my mother on the stage or rostrum of the hall where the party was, when suddenly a bullet whizzed over our heads. A man there stole somebody else's girl, by getting her basket through some unfair means, and that led to further trouble between the men, which ended in the shooting of the man whose girl was stolen from him. I don't think he was killed, but his assailant, if I recall correctly, was imprisoned for life.

If Mr. Bean were here I expect he could tell you considerable about his people and their early pioneer life. About the best I can do is to let you take this reminiscence of Mr. J. M. Sharp, a family connection of Mr. Bean, who, at the age of 87 visited his old home in Oregon, and then flew down to see the Boulder Dam site.

EXCERPTS FROM PUBLISHED REMINISCENCES

OF JAMES MEIKLE SHARP, WHO, AT THE AGE

OF EIGHT, CROSSED THE PLAINS WITH HIS

FATHER AND MOTHER IN 1852.

... In the course of four years, from 1848 to 1852, my father succeeded in gathering a small number of oxen and cows, and was enabled to make preparations to carry out his

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long cherished intentions of crossing the plains with an ox team, purposing to make his future home in the territory of Oregon.

... It was planned to start on the trip in the spring of 1852. My father at this time was fifty-five years of age. Low of stature, stout build, he was in the prime of life... My mother was forty-four years of age, and the mother of seven children... We children helped whenever we could in the preparations for the journey across the plains. Among other things, we cut wheat straw, soaked it in water until it became soft and pliable, and then we braided it in such a way that our mother was able to sew it into hats for us. These hats served us as head covering on the journey to Oregon.

There was much to be done to prepare for the long trail across the continent. It was necessary to have a good wagon to begin with, and a good deal was done to make it as comfortable as possible. There were yokes with bows for the oxen. These yokes were mostly made from wood called Linn, which was somewhat like cottonwood, light but strong. The bows were made of hickory, very strong and enduring. Indeed the yokes, together with the bows, were used many years after we lived in Oregon. There were also substantial chains, each long enough to connect from the rear yoke of oxen to the next in front. There was a tent and bedding, together with limited supplies of clothing and food, and sundry other needful articles. It will be readily seen that when, in addition to the necessary supplies indicated, the living part of the outfit was loaded in the wagon, room was at a premium. As a matter of fact a vast amount of walking was done by members of the family.

We started with six yoke of oxen, each having his personal name in this order, Bill and Berry, leaders; Broad and Darby, Buck and Bright, Joe and Lion, Sam and Pomp, Jack and Charley. We also had a few cows and young cattle, one or two mares and two dogs.

... From a diary kept by mother, I note that we hitched up our motive power and made our start for the far west at two P. M., May 5th, '52. Traveled about ten miles and

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camped. During the night a hailstorm came up, which blew down our tents and saturated everything.... The cattle were corralled during the night, but having been turned out to graze in the morning, became separated, and, in consequences we proceeded on the 7th with a portion of the team, while father went in search of the lost stock. He came up with us on the 8th, bringing the 4 lost stock. The diary showed daily mileage of 4 to 25 miles... the mileage was largely a matter of guess work... In the event of a scarcity of wood, resort was had to "Buffalo Chips", sometimes known as "Bois de Vache" or "Wood of the Cow."

... The rough roads served us well when it came to the matter of churning the cream for butter. The cream was put in a receptacle and placed in the wagon in the morning. When evening came we were sure to have butter.

.... We were now in the beginning of August, the days were growing shorter, feed was dry in many places, and the stock were losing their strength. The road was poor and difficult and progress much slower. We travelled some distance along the Snake river, a tributary of the Columbia, which had cut its way through a high plateau, making it necessary frequently to take the stock down the steep bank for a distance of three-quarters of a mile to get water. Often when we were stooping to drink, if we chanced to look upstream, our eyes would encounter the carcass of some domestic animal lying in the edge of the stream. It was no use to try to pass above the decaying animal for there was a continuous deposit of them. We were obliged to drink the water "as is", but apparently we were not the worse for it immediately. There was practically no wood on this plateau, but in many places there was abundance of bunchgrass, at this time quite dry. While travelling along the Snake river, father secured a fine, large salmon from an Indian, and we looked forward to a good feast at supper time. There being no wood, the salmon was cut up and put in a pot hung over a fire of bunchgrass, and it kept four or five boys busy to supply the required fuel. It was the first salmon we had ever tasted, and there is no doubt it was highly relished.

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By the beginning of September, we began to emerge from the indifferent region through which we had come, and on September 1st, we drove into Grande Ronde Valley, a very beautiful place. The valley is circular, walled in by hills and 5 mountains, while a stream, lined by brush and trees, flows thru it. The grass was good, and the Indian population, with plenty of horses, was active and friendly.

Leaving the beautiful valley of the Grande Ronde we passed over the Blue Mountains. On the 6th of September, after travelling twelve miles, we entered the Umatilla Valley, a fair and promising region, but with no white settlers. The next day is noteworthy for its entry in mother's diary: "This day we travelled twelve miles and encamped at the crossing of the river — out of provisions and family sick." Up to the 11th of September my uncle Turner had travelled with us, but on this day he and his family remained in camp while our outfit pushed on. There was a good deal of sickness in our family, but because of short food supply, nearness of winter and lack of funds, we were obliged to go forward.

Those who were still supplied with funds could plan to load their outfits on a steamer at The Dalles, and by going down the Columbia River, would reach Portland in three or four days. Those without funds, and in many cases short of food supplies, were confronted with the necessity of driving an eighty mile trip across the Cascade Mountains, south of Mount Hood, at a time when winter storms would be prevalent.

... We crossed a number of streams between the Blue Mountains and the point where we reached the Columbia River. One of these streams was John Day's River. A party we had occasionally met while travelling, arrived at the crossing about the same time we did. By some chance, a mother, daughter and grand-daughter belonging to this party, had, while walking, fallen behind quite a bit. So when the men arrived with the wagons they proceeded to ford the river. The stream was some three hundred feet in width; the water, flowing over a gravelly bottom, was cold and practically waist deep, tho' not dangerously swift. We children watched with interest to see what the women would do. They first tried to call to their men folks, but got no encouragement. Finally, the grandmother waded

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in, followed later by her daughter, reluctantly also by the grand-daughter. We boys stood by and looked on. After a while we heard them say, "I'd give five dollars if I was where grandma is" and the grand-daughter was of a similar mind. They all got across without anything worse than a cold bath, however.

On the 25th of September we arrived at Indian Creek.... I believe the place is now known as Waupenitia (Wapinitia).... We were now about to begin our trip through the Cascade Mountains, the distance to Foster's being about eighty miles.

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Quoting from Mother's diary: "Friday, 8th, (October). Drove to Foster's and encamped, where we remained four days.... The roads just passed over were of the worst, the unsatisfactory condition being exaggerated by the rain and snow, which prevailed a good deal of the time. There were swampy sections, almost impassable. Some places had been improved (?) with a corduroy of small poles. Some of the hills were so steep that wagons were let down by using a long rope circled around a standing tree trunk. In other cases a small tree would be cut down and fastened to the rear axle as a drag. The emigrants were leaving whatever they could spare to lighten their loads. I recall seeing a good looking wagon standing a little out of the road with a sign "Hands off", which seemed quite unnecessary.

During the night at one of the worst camps, a woman, whom we knew slightly, passed away, and in the morning her children hitched up and drove away, leaving the husband and father behind. The husband, assisted by my mother, scooped out a little depression, and succeeded in covering the body before departing. Before we were out 7 of the mountains, we met a relief train from the Willamette Valley, bringing supplies for the belated arrivals. As flour was being offered at \$1.00 per pound, and as we were on the bankrupt list, our folks didn't buy any. Some kind-hearted person, better off than ourselves,

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generously gave us a small supply. There being an abundance of huckleberries at hand, we gorged ourselves on huckleberry pie, which proved a life-saver.

During the succeeding days, up to October 16th, we crossed the Clackamas River, arrived at Oregon City, and crossed the Willamette River, thence continued westerly into the Chehalem Valley, and arrived at Mr. George Nelson's place on the 16th....

In Oregon City father secured a loan or donation of five dollars from a worthy gentleman by the name of R. R. Thompson, which must have been another life saver.

Mr. Nelson's house was built on a gently rising ground, and as we drove so slowly up the hill, the sun was about to sink behind the western mountains. Mother, and most of us children were walking. Father had not been feeling well for some days, and was riding in the wagon. As we pulled up alongside the front gateway, a woman came out and asked "Isn't there a sick man in the wagon?" and learning there was had us come into the house. She put father into bed, where they kept him for about two weeks. We think now he must have had typhoid fever. "Uncle George" and "Aunt Peggy", as the Nelsons were known far and wide, were well advanced in years, and had been living in Oregon since 1848. Their house was a large double affair, with a roofed-over open section between.

As soon as father was able to move, we secured a house not far from Mr. Nelson's, from a Mr. Morris, into which we moved November 2, 1853. It was a structure built of small logs, about twelve by sixteen feet. I believe it had a fireplace, because we could hardly have survived a cold winter otherwise. There was a loft or attic, reached by a ladder, and here was the boys' dormitory during the winter. In this small building the nine of us spent the time from November 2, '53 to February 21, '54. There was a snowfall of about two feet during most of this period. Our food was a steady diet of boiled wheat, which was bought at \$5.00 per bushel, or about 8 cents per pound. Strong and wholesome food, but rather monotonous.

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Along in the fall father went south...and filed on a donation land claim of 320 acres in Lane County, about seven miles northwest from what is now known as Eugene.

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During the summer of 1854 my sister Julia and her husband, O. R. Bean, who had been living in Yamhill County, came to Lane County to visit her parents, and in returning by some chance took me with them. I was past eleven then and had not attended school since leaving Missouri. Arrangements were made for me to attend the Panther Creek School, a walk of about two and one-half miles. It was a pay school, but the tuition was not large. I had to furnish books, slates, pencils, ink, pens, penholders and writing paper. Second-hand books, such as McGuffey's and Sander's Readers, Webster's Elementary Speller and Arithmetics were available to a large extent. My first copybook was a number of sheets of foolscap, sewed together as a folio, which had previously been used by an older pupil, and which I interlined with my practice work.

There was no grading, each pupil being advanced according to his aptness. Thus, beginning in July, in a little more than one year, I had run the gauntlet from the first reader to the fifth, and had made fair progress in writing, arithmetic, and geography. The school house were made of boards, with rough benches 9 to sit on, some long; rough desks for writing, and a blackboard or two on the wall.

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When quite a youngster, I was determined to be a consumer of tobacco. My parents were equally determined I should not, and, after discovering that I was using the weed, promised me a book at Christmas if I would refrain. I promised — and kept my word. But, in the stress of making a living, they forgot, and no book appeared at Christmas, so, in a spirit of disappointment and self-assertion, I made a stable broom out of a stick of

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hazelwood. I then walked seven miles to Eugene and sold the broom for twenty-five cents, investing the entire proceeds in a plug of tobacco. I chewed tobacco for about seven years, then wrote out a pledge, saying I would never chew tobacco again, and gave it to my mother. I have always kept this pledge.

Money was very scarce in these days, but father was of a mechanical turn of mind and was able to make our furniture as well as many small articles such as stirrups, etc., for sale.

As a means of adding to our funds, our entire family gathered wild strawberries in season. These we capped and carried them on horseback to Eugene and sold them for a low price. As I remember, it was ten cents a quart. We did not have much in the way of luxuries in these days. I recall once being given an orange by a man in whose store I clerked. I gave the orange to a young girl in whom I had some interest, and she in turn passed it on to her grandmother, much to my discomfort. Part of my duties in this store was to mould candles, weigh in slaughtered hogs, butchered by people about the neighborhood, try out the lard and salt the meat down. I was required to sleep in the store as a means of protecting it. For all this service I received the sum of \$20.00 a month, which sum I passed on to my father.

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Once, when it rained for seven days and nights continuously, I made a raft and travelled on it from Eugene to our ranch, a distance of seven miles.

During this time when I was clerking in Eugene, I was standing in front of the stage depot one day when the stage came in from the south, and the driver threw down his reins, and told us of a most unusual experience. Down on the Umpqua the water was up two or three feet around the houses, and in one yard he saw a woman with a long pole fishing around. "Anything I can do for you?" the driver, asked the woman. "No, I guess not", the woman replied, "The children are crying for a drink, and I'm just trying to find the well."

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One winter, shortly after my return, the teacher who had been engaged to conduct a school close to our home, boarded with us, and by his help and by firelight, I made some progress in arithmetic. A year or so later I attended school for three months, taught by a man who had been educated for an attorney, and who was unusually competent as a teacher. I think it was about the close of my nineteenth year that I attended a three months' school, conducted by a very fine teacher, and made same educational progress. This was the last of my training in the public schools of Oregon. Sometime later I went to Eugene to take an examination for a certificate to teach in the public schools of Lane county. The county superintendent of schools was a merchant whom I knew quite well, and when I told him what I wanted, he took me out to an open platform in the rear of his store, where each of us occupied a convenient drygoods case, and he proceeded with the examination by asking me a few simple questions, requiring me to read a selection or two, and ending up by giving me a certificate inside of half an hour. A year or two later, wishing to teach in Wasco County, I underwent a very similar examination and received a certificate to teach in that county."

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 31, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Library of Congress

Subject Overland Trail Lore and Early Life in Oregon.

Name and address of informant Mrs. J. R. Bean Twin Fir Road, Lake Grove, Oswego, Oregon.

Comment:

In the recollections of James Meikle Sharp, I have endeavored to use only what seemed of a folklore nature. While the covered-wagon entry into Oregon is somewhat similar to that of other pioneers, the efforts of the family to live, after arriving here, and particularly Mr, Sharp's details of his meagre education, his securing of a teacher's certificate, etc., gives something of which comparatively little has been recited by the various pioneers.