



By Ox Team to California: A Narrative of Crossing the Plains in 1860

Lavinia Honeyman Porter

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Lavinia Honeyman Porter, 1836–1910, was born in West Virginia in 1836, moved to Missouri in childhood, married in 1854, and went overland in 1860.

Lavinia writes:

"It WAS in the fall and winter of eighteen fifty-nine that my husband and I decided to emigrate to the far West. Imprudent speculations and other misfortunes had embarrassed us financially to such an extent that our prospects for the future looked dark and forbidding; we then determined to use the small remnant of our fortune to provide a suitable outfit for a lengthy journey toward the setting sun. We were both young and inexperienced, my husband still in his twenties, and I a young and immature girl scarce twenty years of age.

"A journey across the plains of the West was considered a great event in those early days. It was long thought of and planned seriously with and among the various members of the family to which the would be traveler belonged. Whoever had the temerity to propose turning their backs on civilized life and their faces toward the far-off Rocky mountains were supposed to be daring with a boldness bordering on recklessness. Emigration then meant the facing of unknown dangers in a half-savage country.

"After many lengthy debates over the manner of transportation, and a diversified quantity of advice from our numerous friends, as to the merits of horses, mules or oxen, we at last decided (and it proved to be a wise decision) to purchase three yoke of strong, sturdy oxen and a large well-built emigrant wagon; roomy enough to hold all we wanted to take with us, and in which we might travel with some degree of comfort."

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