

1901 EMIGRATION TRIP TO CALIFORNIA as recalled by

Nina Harbour Champion, written down April 8, 1969. (age 78)

Pa had sold our farm! 160 Acres in Davis Co., Iowa. We were going to California!! The news flew around . An auction followed. Notices were posted around like those for Lydia Pinkham's Pink Pills and Bull Durham Tobacco. Farm Implements Live Stock, and Household Goods. Printed, too, in the weekly Bloomfield Democrat.

The eventful day came and I went out by the barn to listen. What a strange kind of public speaking, different from teacher or church or Fourth of July celebration in the Bloomfield Court House square.

Late in the day came the few household items. My father had brought home big wooden boxes and into them my mother had packed the rag carpet which Aunt Alice had woven from rag strips cut and sewn by my mother for many years. She had packed the goose feather bed tick and had emptied the straw tick on which my sister and I slept and packed it and all the pillows and bedding we had. Her brass kettle in which she cooked fruit and the heavy black iron pots and skillet. And the two brand-new enameled ware pieces Pa had bought for her after the Chicago ? (St. Louis? In 1900) Exposition, namely a blue and white water bucket for household water from the well and a green and white dish pan. And all cooking things and dishes. And, of course, all our clothes except those needed for the trip. Also packed was the coffee mill in which my mother ground coffee for Pa for every meal. Once a week she parched the green coffee to always have it fresh. In his final illness he couldn't eat but drank his coffee and said, "There isn't anything tastes better than a good cup of coffee!!"

Pa had packed some tools, including the ax for which Uncle Noah had made the ash handle and the shoe-stand and the three lasts on which he half-soled the family shoes.

After the auction we went to Aunt Alice's for the night. Mother was one of seven sisters, besides four brothers, but she and Aunt Alice were closest.

We three girls were all excited and thrilled to be there. But Ma and Aunt Alice were sad, especially Ma. She was leaving the only place she had known and all her numerous relatives, including Grandma Lester. She knew she would never see any of her folks again.

But Pa had been out to California in 1878 and stayed three or four years and had worked part of the time on a ferry boat running between Sacramento and Marysville and might have stayed if he hadn't got malaria.

He said what a wonderful place California was and that my mother would have better health there. We would head for a brother of his, Uncle Marion, living at Bishop.

Before daylight next morning we girls were routed out of bed and into our winter clothes, then urged to eat a good hot breakfast. Then we were put in the bed of a farm wagon filled with clean straw, and a wool blanket was spread clear over us and tucked down.

(ASKED HOW SHE WAS DRESSED WHEN SHE LEFT IOWA, NINA HARBOUR CHAMPION WROTE: It was clear, cold, winter weather. I assume the usual snow was on the ground. Everything I wore was home-made except a new coat and my high button shoes!! A heavy twilled canton flannel union suit that came down to my wrists and ankles, a full red wool flannel petticoat from neck to mid-leg and a red wool cashmere dress to wrist and mid-leg, along with long black wool stockings that came over my knees and were held by round black garters. A black wool fascinator covered my head and wrapped around my neck. Mother had knit the stocking and fascinator, and black mittens. I think the coat was my first store-bought coat. We had over-shoes for snow.))

“NO, YOU CAN’T LOOK OUT!! You will get your noses frost-bitten if you do.”

The wagon jolted over the frozen ruts for the 5 mi (?) 3 mi (?) trip to Belknap.

There a hot coal fire was roaring in a big pot-bellied stove in the little waiting-room. Now my parents and Aunt Alice and Uncle Will were jointed by two other sisters of my mother and their husbands: Aunt Matt & Uncle Pard Vest and Aunt Lib and Uncle Will Dodd, who lived on farms near-by.

The train was whistling and there was a monstrous roar as it came in. The sisters were crying and embracing. The conductor helped us and our hand luggage on. The train was moving. We were off!!

The train was steam-heated, the first steam heat I ever saw, and we wore easily washed gingham or calico dresses there.

Pa had bought tickets which would connect at Kansas City with the “Emigrant Train” for the West, which ran once a week from Chicago. In earlier years such trains had frun frequently.

(Foot-note: Perhaps the Champions connected with such a Chicago train, if they were still running.

Your Grandpa Champion---1902

Your Grandma Champion & (your) Father---1903)

We rode all day. I have no memory of that day. All the days of riding blurred together till it seemed as if we would go on riding forever. And so many new things happened that there was no time to wonder what California would be like. Just to sit in a train seat and look out a window and see the landscape move was exciting.

We were cooped up and couldn't run in the aisle. And the aisle was such a tempting place to run.

I was just ten, Beulah, 8, and Mabel only 5.

We reached Kansas City after dark and got off. We waited in the depot and Mother put us to sleep on the long seat, with just our shoes off. I was long enough that I had to squeeze under two of the dividing wooden arms, which wasn't a bit comfortable.

From the timeless sleep of children we were roused to put on our shoes and wraps and were led to another train.

I remember my father's urging me to look at the Mississippi River, that it was a mile wide there. I remember seeing water but I was so sleepy I could only see it drowsily & dimly. I couldn't take it in. He must have taken me to the Observation Platform so many times on the trip, pointing out the wonders of our geography.

There were beds on this train, though it wasn't till next morning that I could see their wonders. They were shut in by curtains that pulled back and my sister and I climbed down and saw another bed below us. A Negro porter came and folded the top bed up and then turned the bottom bed into two seats facing each other. But, after breakfast, if no one wanted to ride facing backward, that seat could be reversed.

It was a cold breakfast, the first in my life. All meals would be cold. My parents had brought along a wooden box packed with enough food to last the family five days: fried home-cured ham, home-made sausage, several cooked chickens fresh from the farm, pickles, cookies, apple pies, and apples. And boiled eggs. And big loaves of home-made bread and layers of corn bread. And plenty of home-made butter.

NOTE: I don't actually remember the items except chicken. I just know what farm food was.

My father had bought something called a valise, which seemed to be made of cloth-covered cardboard with braces at the corners. The top came down to the

floor and had a leather handle on top and the valise was buckled around with two leather straps. It held extra clothes for us children & towels. And, I think, home-cured leaf tobacco for my father's pipe.

In a baggage car up front were our two trunks. Maybe the wooden boxes, too. I don't know, but I think so.

This was an Emigrant Train and everyone had household goods or tools of his trade, or such. The man I remember was a lone Swede who couldn't speak English, who refused to let out of his sight a 100 lb. sack of seed potatoes, that he kept on the seat with him. That way they certainly didn't get bruised or frozen.

All of us emigrants lived together as we crossed to the West.

The train even had a substitute for the outdoor privy and the chamber pot with a great draft of cold air below. Also a wash-bowl and running water!! We had never used anything but a washpan by the water bucket, though a rare family had a china bowl and pitcher in the best bedroom, sitting on top of a commode.

My parents were both born to pioneer parents in Davis Co., Iowa first opened to settlement in 1844. So I grew up rooted in pioneer ways, and even started school in a log building that had later been boarded over.

The Negro porter on the train was only the second Negro I had ever seen. The first Negro was a woman who took care of my mother when Mabel was born five years before. So he was another surprise in a week full of surprises.

I remember to this day the long climb up the canyon of the Rio Grande River to Pueblo, Colorado. A second engine was put on, a "double-header" -----a "double-header"---The heavy black coal smoke, with its pungent smell, trailed far behind as the engines labored up the long, steep grade. (Was it to the Continental Divide?)

"Now you will see mountains", my father said. "These are the Rocky Mts." I had never seen a mountain and didn't know what to expect. He would take me---and sometimes one or both sisters---down the aisle and through a heavy door, over clanking couplings and the grink of wheels to the next car---or whichever it was----to the Observation Platform for the marvelous unfolding view. The mountains got higher and higher, the river smaller. There was no end to curves. All the roads at home were straight.

At Pueblo there was a 2 hr. stop. My father took me to a doctor, then got something extra to eat. The doctor said it was just the change in altitude that made me sick and he gave me some pills. He said if I stayed there I would soon get used to it.

We rode so long that everything began to blur. More and more mountains, and fewer farms and fewer people. I think we went through Ogden; maybe I was asleep.

I remember seeing Great Salt Lake, the first lake I had ever seen, and I wished I could be close up. My father said it was so salty you couldn't sink in it..

Crossing Nevada meant nothing to look at, only we changed trains again for Hawthorne, Nevada. I think it was near Reno, but I can't remember whether it was Reno.

The next thing I remember is getting off at Hawthorne to stay over-night at a hotel. I had never seen a hotel. Maybe there was one in Bloomfield but if so, I didn't know about it. I didn't get to town often and usually mother and us girls got off the wagon at Aunt Belle's or Aunt Carrie's while Father did the errands. So this was the first I knew there was a place you could pay to eat and sleep.

The sun was still shining and my father took me for a walk. It was a funny place. More mountains, of course. There was a lake here. (Or have I got it mixed up with Mono Lake next day? I was so tired by then) And there was what he called sage brush and greasewood. And I think I saw a jack-rabbit, not a cotton tail like Iowa. And, maybe, a road-runner. (If not, then soon after we got to Bishop.)

From Hawthorne next day we took a narrow gauge R.R. which ran only three times a week to Laws, a R.R. station near Bishop. It carried the mail. So we crossed desolate Mono County, California, and entered Inyo County. I would soon encounter more Indian names. But I wouldn't see any Indians at first.

From Laws we rode in a stage-coach to Bishop where all the people got off but us. Riding in a stage-coach was a thrill. We had played an indoor game at school on stormy days,----a game called Stage-coach, in which the team ran away and the coach upset, but I had never expected to ride in a real stage-coach.

My mother got no thrill from this or any of the travel. She was homesick. But she would have gone anywhere with my father.

My father hired the stage-driver to take us on to the farm where Uncle Marion and Aunt Mary lived. It was the last 3 mi. of a long journey, and near the end of a long day. The driver reined in his horses and we unloaded.

Father wanted to surprise Uncle Marion. So he had not written ahead. It was a total surprise. Uncle Marion did not even recognize him!!

Father said he was looking for a place his family could stay over-night.

Uncle Marion considered, then suggested a neighbor

Father laughed, loud and hearty. Then Uncle Marion said, "CYRUS!! I didn't know you with that beard."

It was March 5, 1901. We had been on the road almost a week. (I think it was five days, but I can't be sure.)

A new life was ahead, starting in a county with rich farm land and desert, creeks, a river, a lake, and Mt. Whitney and Death Valley.

AS A POST SCRIPT, MOTHER WROTE THIS ON INDIANS:

As for Indians I saw, the first I remember were Piutes (Pai utte—i.e. South Ute's, ce Utah) The Paiutes had been defeated in an Indian War not very long before we moved to Inyo Co. They had been driven back from the farm land and lived in wickiups on the sand hills around. These were rounded huts made of willows and tules.

Some of the women used to come down from the hills to wash for white women. I remember seeing them walk by with a papoose on their back, strapped flat to a board, and the baby blinking out but never crying. We called these women ma - ha - las.

What the men did I don't know. The papoose would be taken down still on the board.

On the Turner ranch, in a field were the crumbling walls of a "fort" against Indians.

Foregoing account of **Moving from Iowa to California by Emigrant Train**, written by my mother, Nina Harbour Champion, was typed up from her hand-written account. She died at age 90, November 30, 1981. Her ashes are interred in Bishop with her mother, Mary Lester Harbour. My Grandmother, Mary Lester Harbour, only lived till October 3, 1903, dying there in Bishop of cancer. Age 48.

My Grandfather, Cyrus Harbour, died June 24, 1933, age 81, and cremated. His ashes were spread on the Pacific Ocean near his home in Carpinteria, California. He had been living there near his daughter, Beulah Harbour Cadwell and her family.

Ninarose Champion Mayer,
youngest child of Nina Harbour Champion
March 25/26, 2009