

47

A QUAKER FORTY-NINER

THE ADVENTURES OF
Charles Edward Pancoast
ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

Edited by
ANNA PASCHALL HANNUM

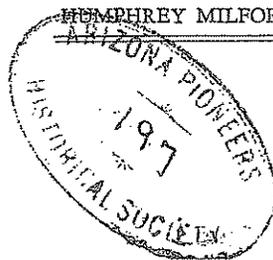
With a Foreword by
JOHN BACH McMASTER

Philadelphia
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS

London

HUMPHREY MILFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1930



THROUGH GUADALUPE PASS

variety. But the most impressive of all was the Giant Cactus, which rose to the height of fifty feet in fluted pillars much resembling the pillars of Girard College¹³ and equal in diameter, of a beautiful green color. Some were single and straight; others had arms protruding from the main pillar and curving gracefully upwards, appearing like Chandeliers. The whole Landscape was sublime and picturesque; yet its effect upon the observer was mingled with the gloom that one experiences in a magnificent Graveyard full of stately Tombs, and it sent my thoughts back to that period of Creation before Vegetation had made its appearance in the newly created World.

We struggled on all day through this wearisome Sand, and failing to find either grass or water, had to lie down without food or drink for ourselves or Stock. The next day we experienced another period of suffering, losing a number of our Oxen, one of which belonged to the Dutchmen, who, having now but one Ox, had to abandon their Wagon and depend upon the Charity of others to carry their Provisions. About three o'clock we came to the southern heel of the Great Bend, where we found wood and grass, and in the evening reached the River, with thankful hearts to the Lord for His continued Blessings.

¹³ The main building of Girard College, in Philadelphia, is in the form of a Greek temple with Corinthian columns.

CHAPTER XVII

THE AMERICAN DESERT

AS OUR Cattle were now mere Skeletons, and we had to traverse a road of nearly three hundred miles reputed to be without a spear of grass, we decided to build two large Rafts after the fashion of our Arkansas River Ferry Boats, and in the morning we were casting about for materials. A number of our Party who had better Teams than the rest were opposed to building the Rafts; and in the afternoon a Wagon was driven out about a quarter of a mile on the Plain, and a large Tent erected. Some of us, not in the secret and anxious to solve the mystery, went out to the Tent; but a Sentinel at the door informed them that it was a Masonic Meeting, and requested them to depart. The secret was solved when on the following day twelve of our best-equipped Teams (including that of our Leader, Capt. Rogers) started down the River with no explanation to us (followed by the Missouri Murderer), leaving us all the "Crippled Ducks" to take care of. Our Comrades Myron and Eugene Angel, overcome with the spirit of haste, resolved to follow on foot, and immediately made up their packs of eighty pounds each to carry to San Diego (a distance of five hundred miles) where they expected to get water conveyance to San Francisco. It was a crazy, and proved to be a sorry project for them.

We elected James Rankin our Captain in place of Capt. Rogers, and proceeded with the construction of our Rafts. Our new Associate, the Husband of the Missouri Woman,

was most zealous and active, and proved the most skillful man among us in fashioning the Boats. The Dutchmen's Wagon and the side-boards of a number of other Wagons were utilised for the double purpose of constructing the Boats and lightening the loads. We stripped our own Wagon of one board from the bottom and two from the sides, shortening the coupling, and discarding about three hundred pounds of Provisions (including what we put on the Rafts) and several articles of convenience that had theretofore appeared to be indispensable, which made us about nine hundred pounds lighter than at the commencement of our Journey.

In five days our Rafts were ready, provided with oars, ropes, and stone anchors. On one of them a shed was erected for the use of the Missourian's Wife. We put on them such portions of our loading as we could best spare (no one being allowed more than two hundred pounds), put four men and the Woman in charge of them, and on the fifth day of November Boats and Teams moved off simultaneously. The Crew told us afterwards that they found the River shallow and full of Bars, and the Current very rapid; they frequently found themselves aground and had much difficulty in getting off. No event happened worth mentioning, except that on the third day out the Woman was taken with Labor Pains. The Boats were landed at a point where there was a sandy soil and a Willow Thicket, into which the Husband took blankets and pillows, and there performed the office of Midwife, while the men remained in waiting on the Boats. In the evening they helped the Husband carry his Wife and Baby on the Boat; the next morning they went on; and on the second day the Lady prepared their meals, and continued to do so to the

end of the Voyage. They arrived at Yuma six days before us. When we came in we all insisted that the Baby (which was a Girl) should be named "Gila," and the Parents assented. I would go a long way to see that Gila Baby if I knew she were now living.¹

I will not tire the Reader with reciting the Story of our long, monotonous, suffering Travel down the Gila, on which our Tribulations exceeded anything we had before experienced. As we had been informed, we found the whole line of the River from this point (which we named "Camp Destruction") to the mouth at Yuma, devoid of grass, and the only food our Cattle could find was Willow leaves and Flags, and once or twice a little bunch grass. Our trials were incessant. We were compelled to let our Stock run loose at night, and the poor Animals would wander such long distances in search of food that sometimes we would have to spend the greater part of the day in hunting them, making only two to twelve miles headway. Before we finished the Journey they became so weak that when we came to a difficult place we were compelled to pull the Wagons over ourselves with ropes. It may well be imagined that our losses were great. We lost about twenty head of Cattle, including two of my best Oxen. Occasionally on the Journey we found abandoned Wagons and Oxen of Dr. Rogers' Train, and adopted the Policy of exchanging our poorest Animals for their best, which had been rested and somewhat recruited. Their Wagons we burned as fuel, and fed such Provisions as they had left to our Stock. At one point we found Eugene's heavy boots, which Smith appropriated to his own use.

¹ This was probably the first American child born in Arizona. The family name is said to have been Howard.

Among our many annoyances we were much pestered with Old Roberts and his Sheep. He had with him his Slave, Green, as well as two men and a Boy whom he was taking for their services; and they had to guard the Animals night and day, until they were so worn out with their incessant labor that we frequently assisted them out of pity.

The weather was hot, and the surrounding Scoriae and Sand made the heat intolerable; our sufferings were almost as great as those of our Stock. A considerable portion of our Route lay over a volcanic country; in some places the crust of the Earth, formed of Scoriae, would sound under our Wagons as though we were passing over the shell of some great Cavity. In this desolate region we found a number of specimens of broken glazed Pottery ornamented with Indian designs, which seemed to us evidence that all this section of the country had at one time been populated by a People much more advanced in the civilised Arts than those we found there in 1849.

On the west side of the River is almost a continuous range of Mountains, their Foot Hills terminating at the borders of the vast Marshes that line the River on that side. On the east the Mountains were low until we came to the Mohawk and Coronation Mountains near the mouth. When we came opposite to Eagle Tail Mountain we noticed something like steam issuing from its foot, and while the Boys were out hunting the Cattle a number of us forded the River and made our way through Flags and Reeds until we came to a Marsh Stream where we saw much evidence of Beaver, and for the first time I saw one of these Animals hauling a load of mud on his tail. At the foot of the Mountain we

found a boiling Spring, which issued with a rumbling noise that made the Boys think Purgatory must be located thereabouts. The water in the Spring was hot enough to cook an egg, and several hundred yards further down we found it still unpleasantly warm.

The country in all this region was so barren of nourishing vegetation that Animals avoided it, and the only Creatures beside the Beaver that we saw in the whole two hundred and fifty miles or more were Tarantulas, Scorpions, and one poor starved-looking Deer. Not even Mosquitoes would abide there.

We kept a sharp lookout for the Maricopa Indians who ranged in this district, and who were reported to be unfriendly. We frequently discovered signs of their recent presence, but aside from stealing one Horse they did not molest us. At one place we found two fresh Graves, with initials carved on the headboards which the Missourians recognised as those of two of their Party whom they had left well, and whom they supposed to have been killed by Indians.

One day we saw a hundred or more Indians approaching us, wearing a curious headgear resembling a light blue Turban, which puzzled us extremely. They proved to be a stupid harmless set called by the Mexicans "Tontos," and their Turbans were composed of blue Potters' Clay covering their hair. (We learned afterwards of the Soldiers at Yuma that they did not always wear this mud turban, but used it occasionally as a substitute for fine-toothed combs.) The men were naked, and the Women wore only a grass tunic similar to that of the Pimo Women. We tried to get some information from them relative to the Parties ahead, but could elicit nothing.

After a terrible march of twenty-one days, well worn out with hardships and trials, we arrived at Fort Yuma, near the mouth of the Gila. On the opposite side of the Colorado we found our Boat Party waiting, and also a Company of Soldiers, who had here provided a Rope Ferry for the use of themselves and the Emigrants. They offered to ferry our Wagons over for fifty cents apiece, and our Cattle for ten cents. Although we had Boats of our own we thought it advisable to pay the Soldiers for conveying the Wagons, as the Colorado was wide and the Current swift; but the Cattle we swam over without losing an Ox. We expected to have a hard time with the Sheep, but Green, Roberts' Slave, tied the Bell Wether with a rope to his Saddle and swam his Horse across while the rest of us hustled the Sheep into the water; and they all followed Green and the Wether, swimming the River without loss.

On the west side of the Colorado there was a Grove of hundreds of acres of Mesquit Trees full of beans, many bushels of which lay on the ground. These beans were reputed to be excellent feed for Cattle; but to our astonishment and dismay (for there was little grass here) our poor starved Creatures would not touch them that night. In the morning, however, we were gratified to find them swelled out almost ready to burst from eating the beans.

The next day we moved our Camp about a quarter of a mile away to a Spring, where we determined to rest several days and to load our Wagons with beans. After Breakfast Lawyer John Rankin, Mr. Armstrong, and myself paid a visit to the Colonel, and were surprised and disgusted with the remarks of this model Guardian of the United States in that locality. We had not talked

