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OVERLAND FREIGHTING IN THE PLATTE VALLEY 1850–1870

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OVERLAND FREIGHTING IN THE PLATTE VALLEY

1850 - 1870

by

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IN THE
PLATTE VALLEY 1850-1870
OVERLAND FREIGHTING IN THE PLATTE VALLEY
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CHAPTER I

The Route - When and Where

"...the valley of the Platte,...that route first made by the buf-
falo, then appropriated by the Indians and the fur traders...",¹ fixed
and gave definite form to the trails and highways of a great overland
commerce.

These valley trails, cut deep by the heavy wagon wheels, were
named by the Indians the "Great Medicine Road of the Whites".²

The Platte River routes had their beginning for white usage in 1813
when a few returning Astorians with one horse found their way down the
valley to the Missouri River. They left no markers nor track deep
enough "to be followed"; they only showed the way. To Milton Sublette
belongs the honor of first having used commercial wagons on what has been
later entitled the "Oregon Trail". He began the journey near the mouth
of the Kansas River, followed up the Little Blue to the Platte, and
thence up the south side of the Platte and North Platte to the Wind River
Mountains in Wyoming. This was in 1830. He returned the same year to St.
Louis with ten wagon loads of furs.³ South Pass, at the head of the Sweet-
water River, a tributary to the North Platte, was discovered in 1823 by a
party under General William H. Ashley of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.⁴ Dur-

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NOTE: This thesis does not include any account of the freighting carried
on by the Mormons.

² Ibid.
³ Addison Erwin Sheldon, Nebraska the Land and the People (Chicago, 1931),
I, 212.

1
ing the early thirties Captain Benjamin L. E. Bonneville, William Walker, Hall J. Kelley, and Nathaniel J. Wyeth successively accomplished overland journeys on the Oregon Trail to the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains.\(^5\)

The history of the trails may be divided conveniently into four periods: (1) The period of finding the way and breaking the trail from the return of the Astorians in 1813 to the Wyeth wagons in 1832; (2) the period of the early Oregon Migration from 1832 to the discovery of gold in California in 1849; (3) the period of the gold rush, 1849-1860; (4) the period of decline, 1860-1869.\(^6\)

It must be understood always that the term "Oregon Trail" applies only to the route which began at Independence, on the Missouri River, and followed across the northeast corner of Kansas, contacting the Platte a short distance east of old Fort Kearny. From here it followed on the south side of the Platte and North Platte, not crossing the latter until well toward the mouth of the Sweetwater. The Mormon Trail or the California Trail followed the north side of the Platte and North Platte until it reached a good distance in Wyoming. Much of the California migration of the "gold rush days" went over this route.\(^7\) A description, somewhat in detail, is given presently of the Oregon Trail and of its feeders; for it was mainly by this famous route that the business of overland freighting was conducted.

The active period of this trade overland covered the years from the later fifties to the late sixties.\(^8\)

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7 Sheldon, op. cit., I, 214.
The map was originated and prepared by the author of this thesis. Acknowledgment is made to Rand McNally and Company, Chicago, for the state outlines. The draughting and the making of the blue-print was by courtesy of Mr. A. E. Fuller, Lincoln, Nebraska.
OVERLAND FREIGHTING TRAILS IN THE PLATTE VALLEY.

By Floyd E. Bessey.

Prepared by Nebraska State Historical Society.

A.E. Fuller Draughtsman.
Nebraska City, Omaha, St. Joseph, Atchison, Fort Leavenworth and a few other places became the great eastern depots from which the constantly outfitting freight trains began their journeys across the prairies. But regardless from which point they may have left the Missouri River they nearly all would meet at some junction in the valley of the Platte.9

Freighters leaving from points in Kansas and traveling the northern route crossed the Big Blue at Marysville, Oketo, and other points. Close to where Marysville is now located a fair fording place facilitated the crossing. Here were seen on the river bottom large cottonwood trees, some three feet or more in diameter.10

The route from the Big Blue to the Little Blue led across a rolling divide.11 The Little Blue was "a stream rather than a river" and oftentimes considerably swollen, but when its banks were full of water was less unwholesome than usual for drinking.12 The trail now followed the course of the Little Blue a long distance having "entered Nebraska near the point where Gage and Jefferson counties meet on the Nebraska-Kansas line."13

At the crossing of the Big Sandy Creek a hewn log stockade had been built. Some trading was carried on here with the travellers and friendly Indians. In the year 1856 a prairie fire had visited the district above

12 William Chandless, A Visit to Salt Lake; Being a Journey Across the Plains and a Residence in the Mormon Settlement at Utah (London, 1857), p. 61.
13 Sheldon, op. cit., I, 212.
the Big Sandy crossing and had left "a most desolate looking region. On all sides was a perfect blackness as far as the eye could see, the only relief being the blue sky above and here and there some partly burnt white bones of some buffalo or other animal".14

A general stopping place for freighters was at Meridian on the Little Blue. It was situated some two miles from the present town of Alexandria in Thayer County. From here the trail consisted of several parallel tracks "making a road from four to ten rods wide". For miles it could be seen winding along the Little Blue. Nearly south of present Hastings was a station called King's Ranch, now Spring Ranch, in Clay County. There were no other stopping places or ranches between King's Ranch and Fort Kearney15 unless Dogtown, ten miles east of the fort on the big road, should be mentioned.16

Between the Little Blue and the Platte a divide was crossed. This was "a high prairie, that seemed to be almost perfectly flat".17

Fort Kearny was located on a Reservation by the same name. Here no settlements were allowed. At the fort were stationed troops, cavalry and artillery for the protection of the great freighters' trains, protection from the hostile Indians who roamed the great prairies and subsisted upon the hundreds of thousands of buffalo which grazed in the vast sandy country of the Platte.18 Chandless describes these great buffalo herds as "many hundreds, perhaps thousands, together, blacken-

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16 Marvin, op. cit., 226.
17 Gibson, op. cit., 19.
Kearney City located on the great national ox team thoroughfare played a part during the overland freighting days. For many years it was the most important town between the Missouri River and San Francisco. The date of its founding antedates either Omaha or Denver and is about coeval with the founding of Nebraska City. At the culminating point of prosperity Kearney City "was well supplied with saloons, dance houses, gambling parlors and boarding ranches. No small number of difficulties were adjusted with powder and lead in the city and its suburbs instead of by the more tedious formality of the doubtful law of the territory, pleaded and executed by the more doubtful lawyers and courts then and there located".  

West of Fort Kearny, some two or three days by freight wagon, was located Plum Creek. Between the above mentioned fort and South Crossing, which will be described shortly, the Platte valley has an average width of some six or eight miles. Except for a few places the river divides this valley about evenly, and during the period of this study it had a width of nearly a mile. The valley itself was closed in north and south by bluffs two hundred to three hundred feet high.  

The next point of interest was Fort McPherson in Lincoln County. It was a large post and was built mainly of cedar logs. There were buildings sufficient to accommodate ten or more companies of infantry and cavalry. Trains were halted often here for inspection as to the proper equipment of arms and a sufficient supply of ammunition. Or perhaps trains were united to afford better protection against the Indians.  

19 Chandless, op. cit., 65.  
21 Sydenham, op. cit., 171.  
22 Chandless, op. cit. 64.  
23 John Bratt, Trails of Yesterday (Lincoln, 1921), p. 60.
O'Fallon's Bluff, also in Lincoln County and west of the junction of the North and South Platte rivers, was a point feared by the freighters. It was a place feared, no doubt, because of the almost impossibility to corral the wagons against an Indian attack. The bluffs here came close up to the bank of the river, so close, in fact, that the road had to cross over the bluffs instead of following the river. Mr. Young, in a sentence, gives a word picture of the situation.

"The trail over the bluffs was of sand, and those heavily laden, white covered prairie schooners would often sink to the hubs, requiring from fifty to seventy-five yoke of oxen to haul them across, often being compelled to double the leading yoke as far back as the wheelers, then doubling again, would start them on a trot, and with all in line and pulling together, would land the deeply sunken wheels on solid ground."26

One entire day might be used to cross the bluff, when the smooth, hard road of the river would be reached again. Here, however, a stream called Alkali Creek was reached whose waters to man and beast were poisonous.27

There was another stopping place before fording the South Platte; this was on the east of Fort Sedgwick but close to the fort. Several companies of soldiers, infantry and cavalry were garrisoned at Fort Sedgwick during the middle sixties.28

Before describing the crossing of the South Platte and continuing the story of the route up the North Platte to South Pass, it is best to digress and follow briefly the trail into Denver on Cherry Creek.

24 Charles E. Young, Dangers of the Trail in 1865 A Narrative of Actual Events (Geneva, N. Y., 1912), pp. 54-55.
25 Ibid., op. cit., 171-172.
26 Young, op. cit., 54-55.
27 Ibid.
28 Bratt, op. cit., 63.
The freighters for Cherry Creek stayed mainly on the south side of the South Platte and reached, shortly after leaving Nebraska, a place called Julesburg.

One writer referred to Julesburg as the "Portable Hell of the Plains", and added that his "finer feelings cannot, if words could, attempt a description". This "toughest town in the West", however, was the most important division point for one of the largest overland freighting organizations of the period.30

As stated above, the greater portion of the freight-trains on this route followed along the south bank of the South Platte, and continued along this water course to the mouth of Cherry Creek.31

"...Denver was originally called Auraria and was located on the west bank of Cherry Creek." It was the "mecca" for many western freighters and served the western territories as a distributing point.32

At best the road to Denver was a lonely trail. In 1863 there were but four post offices on the Platte between Valley City and Denver, a distance of more than four hundred miles.33

The progress at the South Platte Crossing was naturally slow, but time and perseverance would win.34 The river was broad. Mr. Bratt states it was a half mile wide at that point, and when bank full the water was dirty-reddish in color.35

29 Young, op. cit., 147.
31 Root and Connelley, op. cit., 307; Nebraska City News, October 23, 1858.
33 Root and Connelley, op. cit., 313.
34 Sydenham, op. cit., 172.
35 Bratt, op. cit., 64.
Because of quicksand two teams would double up; in most cases this made twenty-four oxen to a wagon. If the water was running high the river might be sounded, thus locating the most suitable fording place. The wagon beds would be raised, and the banks spaded down if a hitherto unused ford were crossed. Two to five men on a side would cross with each wagon, for it was no small task to keep the entire team in action. If there were sufficient horses with the train the men might ride; otherwise they would wade. A crossing was made in 1862 when the river was thick with mush-ice, and there were also chunks of floating ice of such size as to nearly knock a driver over. On this occasion some of the drivers waded the river nine times. 36

Ash Hollow on the North Platte in Garden County received its name, no doubt, from the ash trees that overhung the hundred foot cliffs that formed the three or four mile long hollow, and which was one hundred and fifty to two hundred yards wide. 37 To this point the trail led from South Crossing, a distance of about fifteen miles. 38 The greater part of this distance was across a high ridge or divide; the latter part was through the steep canyon of the hollow. 39 To be sure this afforded "the very perfection of a place" for an Indian attack. 40

The road bed for the most part was deep loose sand. In the year 1863 a Mr. McCoy received a contract to construct bridges over the sand using litter from the stage stations and ranches, and over this litter was spread prairie sod. 41

36 Herman Robert Lyon, "Freighting in the '60s," in Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society (Lincoln, 1902), Second Series, V, 265, 267; Chandless, op. cit., 72; Sydenham, op. cit., 172; Gibson, op. cit., 70.
37 Chandless, op. cit., 72-73.
38 Sydenham, op. cit., 172.
39 Gibson, op. cit., 22.
40 Chandless, op. cit., 72-73.
The descent at Ash Hollow was steep and crooked, and great care was needed to keep the big wagons from capsizing. A crude breaking apparatus or "rough lock" was used to stay the speed of the load. This consisted of a log chain fastened at one end to the wagon; the other end was thrown through a rear wheel "in such a way as to be between the ground and the wheel". This served as a brake.

It was fortunate for the freighters, however, that the steepest side of the hills was the western side, for most of the freight was westbound. Had it been otherwise it would have been often necessary to unload the wagons before making the ascent.

Occasionally the route from South Crossing to the North Platte took a little different course. The direction was more northwest following Lodgepole Creek, and passing through the little village of Lodgepole, and then to the North Platte.

The trail up the North Platte from Ash Hollow was guided by many old landmarks. A nice description of these is given by Mr. Sydenham.

"From there we tracked up the North Platte river past many curiosities of nature in the hills bordering the river. The first of these, the Court House Rock, looked like the dome of a large building looming up in the sky, with many other formations around it, resembling steeples, turrets, and towers of buildings in a large city. Jail Rock, also stands close to Court House Rock. Passing further up the Platte was another freak of nature in the form of a high towering rock on the top of a steep and high hill, the rock being about twenty-five feet or more through and square like a chimney of some factory - towering up into the sky several hundred feet, left there by the great waters that at one time covered this part of the earth. This was known as Chimney Rock and could be seen a long distance before coming to its base. One more noticeable feature in that interesting country was the formation known as Scott's Bluffs."

42 Sydenham, op. cit., 172.
44 Chandless, op. cit., 72-73 (foot-note).
45 Lyon, op. cit., 286.
46 Sydenham, op. cit., 172-173.
One writer has called Scott's Bluff "The Gibraltar of Nebraska." To the west of the Bluffs, some two miles distant, was Fort Mitchell, an adobe structure. And twelve miles further west was a ranch near Horse Creek. Another forty miles to the west and the crossing of Laramie River was reached at Fort Laramie, Goshen County, Wyoming. The trail was rough beyond Fort Laramie and many a freighter's wagon suffered broken wheels in those bad lands.

Several stations, camps and landmarks aside from Fort Laramie were located along the route in Wyoming. The most historic of them were Warm Springs and Old Horseshoe Stage Station in Platte County; Camp Campbell, 1863, Old "La Bonte" Stage Station and Old Deer Creek Station, 1863, in Converse County; Fort Caspar, Sweetwater Crossing, Independence Rock, and Devil's Gate in Natoma County; and Three Crossings and South Pass in Fremont County.

From the crossing to the north bank of the North Platte at Fort Caspar to the mouth of the Sweetwater to the south there was a fifty mile stretch of barren and thirsty land. The Sweetwater enters the Platte through a valley made by the Rattle Snake Mountains on the north and the Green and Seminoe Mountains on the south. A trading post was located at the junction of the rivers. The Sweetwater valley, "perhaps a mile and a half wide", was well grassed; there were a few cedar trees. The mountain ridges were steep, high, and rocky. In the center of the valley

47 Grant L. Shumway, History of Western Nebraska and Its People (Lincoln, 1921), II, 52.
48 Bratt, op. cit., 67, 70.
49 Wyoming State Highway Department, 1936 Highway Map of the State of Wyoming Showing Historic Trails (Cheyenne, 1936).
and not far west of the trading post is Independence Rock, "a solid bare mass of granite, some 500 yards in length, and 200 feet in height...". About six miles farther west is Devil's Gap or Devil's Gate. The ascent to South Pass was "continuous, but never steep". There is neither mountain ravine nor gorge at the pass itself, but a broad table land twenty miles from north to south and four or five across from east to west. The elevation at South Pass is 7550 feet above the sea.  

Thus far there has been traced the route of the old Oregon Trail, starting from Independence on the Missouri. But aside from the traffic of the trail proper there were many feeders from different points, especially in Nebraska. These feeders followed various routes, but all, eventually, joined the main line somewhere along the Platte. In fact, the operation was similar to that of the great railroad systems which followed.  

Before 1860 trains leaving from Nebraska City in Otoe County or from Plattsmouth in Cass County would cross Salt Creek where Ashland is now located. There was a limestone ledge which made a firm crossing at this point. The route then followed "up the Platte, running north, making a big bend around what is now the counties of Saunders, Butler, and Polk", continuing southwest across Hamilton and uniting with the main trail in Hall County. On the map the trail would have the appearance of a huge ox-bow. Some of the principal points of the route were

50 Chandless, op. cit., 102, 105, 106, 108; Gibson, op. cit., 71.
51 Marvin, op. cit., 226.
52 Sheldon, op. cit., I, 216.
53 D. P. Rolfe, "Overland Freighting from Nebraska City," in Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society (Lincoln, 1902), Second Series, V, 280.
54 Sheldon, op. cit., I, 216.
Ashland, Walker's Ranch, Ingram's Ranch, Jameson's Ranch on the Wahoo, Reed's Ranch and McCafe's Ranch near Elm Creek. Ashland was the only town in 1864 between Plattsmouth and the little village of Dogtown a short distance east of Fort Kearny. "Old Glory", and Fort Kearny, "looming up like an oasis in the desert", were welcome sights to the tired freighter westward bound. "Fort Kearny! name full of interest to the early freighter...name so full of historical incident and reminiscence!"

Another feeder was a route from Omaha. This followed the north bank of the Platte uniting with the ox-bow line via Shinn's Ferry a few miles from the present site of Schuyler in Colfax County, or fording the Platte near Fort Kearny and converging with the trunk line there.

One of the first camping grounds out from Omaha was Robbers' Roost. It is not known how it received its name except it was a place where people would get relieved of some of their cash. The next stopping place might be Elk Horn or Raw Hide. The road from Elk Horn to Fremont was heavy in wet weather, and more wagon tongues were broken on this fourteen mile stretch in a wet season than were broken from Fremont to North Platte. There was serious work and thought when a three or four ton load would attach itself to a mud hole. After crossing the Loup River such camping grounds as Eagle Island, Warm Slough, Lone Tree, Wood River, and Boyed's Ranch were familiar landmarks to the freighters. Ten miles west from Boyed's Ranch the Platte River was crossed. This was a

56 Sydenham, op. cit., 168.
difficult undertaking, especially when ice was forming. The water never froze sufficiently at that point to carry teams and wagons. Fording was accomplished through the ice. This was slow work and an entire day was needed to cross successively with a dozen wagons. 58

Shinn's Ferry mentioned above was a point on the Platte where hundreds of wagons would be transferred to the south bank of the river. The water at this place had a depth of several inches to many feet. At times it appeared more like a lake than like a river. Teams were doubled to avoid loss of cargo in the quicksand and each unit might be guided by a man on horseback. Several drivers would cross with the teams and keep them moving.

At as early a date as 1858 the advantages of a straight route from Nebraska City to Fort Kearny were set forth. A testimony by a Mr. Lander contained these two points: "The distance is much less than from Leavenworth or Kansas City," and "It is a much better road than the North Platte road." 60

The report evidently had the desired effect, for a few business men of Nebraska City soon saw the commercial gain which a shorter route to the west would offer. A meeting was held and a plan was agreed upon. A Mr. Hill was chosen to investigate and locate if possible a direct east and west route between Nebraska City and Fort Kearny. An outfit was soon provided and Mr. Hill started on his tour of investigation. His re-

58 Pat Hayes, Letter written January 14, 1899, MS. Nebraska State Historical Society.
59 George A. Bruffey, Eighty-one Years in the West (Butte, 1925), p. 25.  
60 Nebraska City News, December 11, 1858.  
NOTE: Charles Boyd Mapes in a Thesis, The Nebraska City - Fort Kearny Cut-Off, University of Nebraska, 1931, gives an interesting account of the direct route from the Missouri River to Fort Kearny.
port was all that could have been wished even by the most hopeful. A route, he stated, had been found "running due west to the Blue, crossing Salt Creek near Saltillo, a point about eight miles south of Lincoln". The new trail would cross the Blue River near the mouth of the West Blue. The route could be laid out on high ground most of the way and would run through the southern part of Seward, York, Hamilton, and Hall Counties. Otoe and Lancaster Counties would be crossed by the new trail. A saving in distance of at least forty miles would be made compared with the old ox-bow trail, "and a shortening of time for ox trains of over two days".61

A press comment of that day reveals the spirit of the people in the enterprise:

"A Straight Road: seventy-five miles saved!!! Wood, water, and feed in abundance! Good ford at Salt Creek.

"Mr. Aug. F. Harvey, the City Engineer of this place, returned on Wednesday evening from an inspection of the direct road from Nebraska City to Fort Kearney. He went out at the instance of Messrs. Majors & Co., to examine the bridges, fords, and bottoms of the streams, with a view to the heavy movement of their western business. The settlers on the Nemaha and Salt Creek are now busily engaged in building culverts, &c. and when the work is done, which will be within two weeks, there will be no better road in Nebraska. The 'points' and distances on this road are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Miles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From the Presbyterian Church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Wilson's - straight line</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Walnut Creek</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Iler's Bridge</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Nemaha Ford</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Robert's Farm - bridge over Nemaha</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Meacham's - Otoe county line</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Salt Creek - straight road</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Beranger - on Big Blue - along divide</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; a Creek - bridged</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; a Creek</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

61 Rolfe, op. cit., 280-281.
"On this route there is no section where wood, water and grass cannot be found within one mile. The road has this other advantage, it runs through settlements all the way for a distance of one hundred and ten miles, where grain can be purchased for stock.... Camping places are convenient to the road, and water close by. The ford at Salt Creek is the best in the country - the bed of the Creek having been filled to a depth of ten feet with good stone.

"Every person going west will find it to his interest to take the direct road, and save thereby from seventy to eighty miles of dreary, lonesome travel."62

The same paper was able to report a few weeks later that the new road had been opened between Nebraska City and Fort Kearny.63

Another of the newspapers was not unmindful of the active part taken by the settlers along the route of the new road who aided with the work and gives due credit to these enterprising ranchers.64

A solid bridge was built over Salt Creek and over Blue River. And to definitely mark the trail a furrow was ploughed the entire distance from Salt Creek to the Platte River.65

To finance the bridges of the road "Otoe County voted $20,000 of twenty year bonds at ten per cent."66

The new route received various names, such as, the Nebraska City "Cut Off", the "Air Line" road, and the Steam Wagon Road.67 This route became a very heavy feeder to the freighting traffic of the Platte valley.

62 Peoples Press, March 27, 1860.
63 Ibid., April 24, 1860.
64 Nebraska City News, June 30, 1860.
65 Rolfe, op. cit., 281.
66 Sheldon, op. cit., 218.
67 Peoples Press, March 27, 1860; Nebraska City News, June 16, 1860; Marvin, op. cit., 226-227.
"THE NEW ROAD DISTANCES."

"The distances to the various points on the new road by way of Fort Kearney are as follows:

From Presbyterian Church
To Wilson's Bridge (camp) 8.5 16
Brownell's " 7.5 16
Nemaha " 2.5 18.5
Olathas Salt Creek 28 46.5
Beranger on Big Blue (camp) 25 71.5
Junction with old road 70.5 142
FORT KEARNEY 40 182
Seventeen mile point 17 199
Shakespeare 4 203
Plum Creek 15 218
Willow Island 15 233
Smith's Ranch 8 241
Stage Station 4 245
Springville 6 251
Fifteen Mile Point 10 261
Ranch 6 267
Cottonwood Springs 8 275
Box Alder 3 278
Jack Morrow's 7 285
Fremont Slough 11 296
Williams' 9 305
O'Fallon's Bluffs 5 310
Lower Crossing Platte 38 348
Upper Crossing " 27 375
Lillian Springs 30 405
Beaver Creek 40 445
Fremont's Orchard 31 476
Fort St. Vrain 44 520
DENVER 43 563
From Nebraska City to Denver City 563 miles." 68

The distance of Fort Laramie from Independence on the Missouri measured 672 miles; another 300 miles and South Pass, the head of the North Platte Valley, was reached.69 Fort Kearny was separated from Fort Laramie by some 400 miles of overland trail.70

68 Peoples Press, April 6, 1860.
69 Hulbert, op. cit., 189.
70 Chandless, op. cit., 62-63.
Across the rolling plains, over the prairie swells, through the creeks and valleys, up and down the ridges, hills and divides the white covered "transport wagons dotted the landscape, giving the trail the appearance of a river running through great meadows, with many ships sailing on its bosom." 71

Over this extensive ungraded highway system it was "the freighters who had served to establish the routes and emphasize their length". 72

In 1860 the route was spoken of as a "'great thoroughfare'", broad and worn as a "'Roman military'" road, and "'the best and the longest natural highway in the world'". 73

"In the summer of 1861, the Platte trail was a national highway, with as much significance and as great a length as any continuous road has had," and regardless of the decision by the Post Office department that the Texas route was a superior route, the Platte trail was favored by a heavier traffic of freight to the West. 74 The National Government recognized the greater importance of the Platte trails by transferring, in 1866, "all the military posts on the Platte..." from the Department of Missouri to the Department of the Plains. 75

The old trails have been put under the plow. The soil has been turned and turned again until, save in a few places, the last wheelprints of the freighters' wagons have well-nigh disappeared. In western Nebraska a few old wagon tracks 76 still remain and sunflowers 77 still

72 Paxson, op. cit., 494.
73 Katherine Coman, Economic Beginnings of the Far West (New York, 1912), II, 355.
74 Paxson, op. cit., 465,466.
76 Addison Erwin Sheldon, Nebraska Old and New (Lincoln, 1937), p. 327.
77 Ibid.
mark the winding trails followed three score and ten years ago by sturdy men of iron body, of steel nerve, of brave heart, and of rugged courage.

"But it's barbed wire fence, and section line,
And kill-horse-travel now;
Scoot you down the canyon bank,--
The old road's under plough.

"O little by-path and big highway,-
Alas, your lives are done!
The freighter's track is a weed-grown ditch
Points to the setting sun."78

CHAPTER II
An Eastern Base

An overland freighting terminus was a busy place. River steamers were arriving and leaving; others were at dock discharging great quantities of freight; warehouses were crowded; the big prairie schooners were loading for their long westward journeys; overland trains were constantly entering and departing; oxen, mules, horses, wagons, and trainmen filled the streets, and the merchants in their shops and stores were doing a lucrative business.

"Here were large parks of wagons, immense herds of cattle, great stacks of yokes, and piles of chain ready always for business." On the outskirts were hundreds of the big white topped freight schooners "in corral formation". Mounted herders kept watch over the hundreds of grazing mules and oxen.

The terminus had a special section that was set aside for the freighters. Here were outfitting stations, work shops, dwellings, warehouses, and perhaps a small park. One city had such a park equipped with speaker's stand and benches. During favorable weather regular services were conducted for the trainmen and townspeople. At one base a beautiful grove served as the meeting place for one of these sections.

It was not uncommon for a large freighting concern to own and operate its own store. Here its employees might purchase in advance

1 Sydenham, op. cit., 166.
2 Young, op. cit., 19.
3 W. W. Cox, "Reminiscences of Early Days in Nebraska", in Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society (Lincoln, 1893), V, 7.
4 Nebraska City News, May 22, 1858.
such supplies as were needed, the account being taken care of by their earnings.

But besides such company accommodations there were many private stores and business houses. In fact there might be blocks of the city where there were only men's clothing shops, "fitting-out houses", and "outfitting establishments". It was a delightful situation for the merchants. Prices were generally very high; and it seemed there was not much price competition, for the merchants were "perfectly independent". The approach of a wagon train, returning from an extensive journey, put "broad smiles" on the faces of the merchants, especially the clothiers. They expected a harvest and oftentimes reaped one. "Thirty full suits" might be sold at one counter in a single evening. Of course, the boys coming off the long dusty trail desired to fix up a bit and to appear in their best when they returned home.

But there were other places where the "bull whacker" might spend his money. There were "saloons, gambling houses, dance halls and all manner of rough amusements" to extract the wages, laboriously earned, from the trainmen. The greater portion of the night before a start on a long slow journey was often spent by many of the men in dissipation.

When a certain city might be selected as a base by a large organization such as the firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell, the freighting facilities required dimensions of considerable proportion. This firm

5 C. F. Bentley, "Freighting in 1866; A Letter," in Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society (Lincoln, 1894-95), Second Series, I, 46, 47.
6 Cox, op. cit., 76-77.
OUTFITTING BUILDINGS AT AN EASTERN BASE

Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society
was but one of many freighting agencies of Nebraska City. It was, however, the largest. A brief account of the activities of this one enterprise will partially depict the characteristics of an eastern base.

One hundred and thirty-eight lots were purchased by Russell, Majors and Waddell for building sites and general headquarters location. On this land were constructed houses, several wagon shops, a number of blacksmith shops, machine foundaries, outfitting and repairing posts, boarding houses, and storehouses, one of which was a large fifty by one hundred and thirty foot two story building above the basement.

Many men were employed at the base; sixty to seventy carpenters, ten to fifteen blacksmiths, and as many wheelwrights, many plasterers, masons, and other hands for general work, in all some five hundred. In lands and buildings the company spent more than three hundred thousand dollars. Naturally, the city was benefited in all its branches of business for being a freighting terminus.

The freight for an eastern base came by flat bottom steamboats up the Missouri River. Spacious wharfs and levees received the merchandise; and perishable goods were stored in the warehouses. All other freight might be left on the wharfs and covered with tarpaulin until loaded into the big wagons.

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8 Nebraska City News, May 22, 1858.
9 Ibid., May 22, 1858; December 11, 1858.
10 Ibid., August 21, 1858; Ibid., May 22, 1858.
11 Ibid., May 5, 1860.
12 S. F. Nucholls, "Letter from S. F. Nucholls," in Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society (Lincoln, 1885), 1, 35.
13 Cox, op. cit., 77; Young, op. cit., 20.
14 Nebraska City News, March 27, 1858.
15 Young, op. cit., 20.
The newspapers contained many notices of steamboat activity. The following three examples illustrate this feature:

"The Hannibal landed one hundred and nine wagons for Russell, Majors & Waddell at the lower levee on Thursday."16

"HEAPS OF FREIGHT. - The West Wind made our landing last evening, loaded down to her guards with freight for this point. She had on board two Quartz Crushers, for the mines, and a large quantity of other freight."17

"140 tons of Government freight arrived here on the West Wind on Tuesday last, for shipment over the plains by A. Ayres & Fateet. Several hundred more tons are to arrive within twenty days."18

One year's record of steamboat arrivals at an eastern freighting base is available:

"Steamboat Arrivals at Nebraska City."

"During the past season there has been the following number of steamboat arrivals at this city:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for the above months</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"There has been collected from the above boats the sum of $373.30, for the use of the Levee, upon which there has been landed about 9,280 tons of freight."19

Notices of the movement of overland trains is even more interesting:

"Trains have been leaving daily for Fort Kearney, during the past week. The trains for Utah begin to start in a few days."20

16 Nebraska City News, June 4, 1859.
17 Ibid., April 27, 1861.
18 Ibid., June 7, 1862.
19 Ibid., March 10, 1860.
20 Ibid., May 22, 1858.
"Mr. L. Carter, formerly of this city, returned from Denver on last Saturday evening. He returns again on the first of the week, with a train of five large wagons.\textsuperscript{21}

"110 of the big (Government) wagons have left this city during the week past, carrying an average of 5000 lbs., or an aggregate of over a half million pounds.\textsuperscript{22}

"...we are gratified to note a very remarkable increase of the freighting trade. From a register kept by a person who has an opportunity of seeing nine in ten of the outgoing wagons we have the following numbers of them for the weeks ending

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{lcccc}
May 31st & 93 \\
June 7th & 110 \\
" 14th & 146 \\
" 21st & 131 \\
" 26th (five days) & 152 \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

or a total of 632 of the large government wagons, in two days over a month. Each of these wagons carries an average of 5,000 lbs., or an aggregate of 3,170,000 pounds – over fourteen hundred tons of 2,240 lbs.... NOTE.-- In the figures above not a single emigrant wagon was counted.\textsuperscript{23}

In fair weather or foul and regardless of the condition of the trails the big wagons were being loaded constantly and large trains were ever lumbering through the streets and stretching away from the base onto the expansive prairie. Nevertheless complaint was registered at times because of the overcrowded warehouses and the heaps of freight awaiting transportation.\textsuperscript{24}

The preparation of new trains for the trail occupied weeks of time. There was branding to be done, thousands of wild oxen to be subjugated and broken to the yoke, wagons to be rigged, and hundreds of animals to be shod. One blacksmith shop on a given day had four hundred mules waiting for shoes.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Ibid., June 7, 1862.
\item[22] Ibid.
\item[23] Ibid., June 28, 1862. The Note of the quotation intends to state, no doubt, that only freight wagons were counted and that only freight wagons make up the numbers in the report. It hardly would mean there were no emigrant wagons passing through that city. But the note does remove any possible doubt as to whether emigrant wagons might have been counted and the number included in the report. It simply emphasizes the magnitude of the overland freight traffic.
\item[24] Nebraska City News, March 23, 1865.
\item[25] Ibid., March 10, 1860.
\end{footnotes}
TAMING WILD CATTLE

Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society
All freighters branded their oxen. The mark usually being the first letter of the owner's last name. This mark served for identification should the teams of separate trains become mixed. The branding process was amusing enough to the onlooker, but it was rather trying to the men performing it. A lasso is thrown over the horns of the animal and by means of it is escorted to a wheel of a heavily loaded freight wagon. While one man grasps the beast by the tail and twists him to attention, another applies a white hot iron to the animal's hind quarter. The brand would be burnt "through hair and hide and into the flesh". A salt and water solution might then be applied for medicinal purposes. If an "elegant brand" were desired the oxen would be thrown; for kicking, otherwise, prevented such a mark. The branding iron of about four inches long was attached to a three foot iron rod. Several men would be kept busy supplying wood for the fire.26

The breaking of the steers to the yoke was serious business. Such occasions often drew large crowds from the townspeople who would witness the procedure.27

Forty or fifty wagons would be chained in a circle. A number of wild and half wild steers, the Texas and Cherokee "varieties" being the wildest, would be driven into this ring. Many of the oxen were at first as wild as buffaloes.

Half a dozen men would be assigned to the ring to tackle the steers and yoke them for the first time. Many of the animals would need to be conquered by the lariat, their heads drawn to the hub of a big wheel and there by much effort be yoked with other steers as wild as they. "Free use of the prairies" would be given then for each yoke of oxen to jump, to pitch, to kick, to foam or to twist their necks off as they

26 Young, op. cit., 26-27; Chandless, op. cit., 16-17.
27 Nebraska City News, May 14, 1859.
sometimes did, many a wagon left its base with, but two of the six yoke of oxen that ever had felt the weight of a yoke before. Some of the wildest steers might be left yoked for several days or perhaps for several weeks.28

When a fresh ox team was finally hitched to a wagon, and it sometimes required a dozen men to do it, the wild cattle might start on a stampede. It was a job well done for the men to keep them on the trail.29

The drivers would choose their wagons and sometimes paint devices and titles on their white covers. These names would greatly amuse the passers-by when on the trail. The wagons might receive such names as Polar Star, City Hotel, Excelsior, Clipper No. 2, Constitution, The President, The Republic, The King of Bavaria, Louis Napoleon, or Old Kentuck.30

The cattle now branded and partially broken, and wagons chosen and named, the drivers would haw and gee their charges to the warehouses, wharfs, or quartermaster's storehouse.31

From three to five tons of freight, according to stowage, would be placed in each wagon.32

To load well and to combine weight and bulk in the proper proportion, especially when there was a variety of goods, required skill and hard work. Perishable goods such as sugar, salt, flour, beans and crackers were placed on top of canned goods. This arrangement prevented cargo spoilage by water entering the wagon box when a river was forded.33

Just before a wagon train would leave for its long hard journey

28 Ibid.; Marvin, op. cit., 228; Chandless, op. cit., 19; Young, op. cit., 27-28.
29 Bratt, op. cit., 53.
30 Chandless, op. cit., 19; Stough, op. cit., 72.
31 Sydenham, op. cit., 166; Young, op. cit., 20.
33 Bratt, op. cit., 66; Chandless, op. cit., 12.
across the plains it was not uncommon for the head of a freighting company to call the men together and address them. Appropriate remarks on duty, morals, courage, honor, faithfulness and discipline would be presented. These meetings were attended often by citizens of the town.

When a train returned from its laborious, fatiguing and dangerous trip there was at times a pleasant social hour given for the trainmen. The gathering might be in the public meeting hall or at a freighter's house. Commending speeches were made. Refreshments were served. And it may be certain the teamsters rejoiced over a change of menu.34

An eastern base was not without its rivals in the overland freighting days. A writer in 1865 expressed an opinion that "Omaha...was a feeble rival for the outfitting of...freight trains to Colorado and Utah..."35 The comparison was made with towns in Kansas. But even five years before the above date an optimistic news item appeared in an Omaha paper which commented on the brisk trade overland from that city. And, with no doubt as to that town's future growth and importance, added that in "another year the wholesale trade of Omaha will more than rival that of St. Joseph."36

Then there appears the bold unqualified statement that "...more trains started from Atchison than from any other point on the river."37

Nebraska City not to be surpassed by her rivals took ample opportunity to announce her importance as an eastern base. That she should receive the "lion's share" of the traffic was only reasonable. That the Colorado merchants realized the "immense advantages" offered for trade

34 Nebraska City News, May 21, 1859; Ibid., November 12, 1859.
35 Samuel Bowles, Our New West (Hartford, 1869), p. 31.
36 Omaha Nebraskan, July 14, 1860.
37 Root and Connelley, op. cit., 303.
with this city were evident.  

That freighters should be changing their base from other towns to Nebraska City and that river steamers were more frequent arrivals and left great and greater quantities of freight was all taken for granted as the way it should be.  

Nebraska City, however, was a freighters base in the true sense of the name. It was more of a base than it was a town. The "wild and woolly" little village depended almost entirely for its support on the transportation of freight westward.

The location of a base and of its importance as compared with another, matters little here. In each place there seemed to exist the ambition "to make 'something' out of 'nothing'". Much money was made and much money was taken away. There was nothing, perhaps, in the freighting business that tended to build up the town or city in which a base was located. It was a business which perhaps took as much money from a community as it had given it.

38 Nebraska City News, April 27, 1861; Ibid., June 28, 1862.
39 Ibid., April 30, 1859; February 8, 1862; February 22, 1862; March 1, 1862.
40 Rolfe, op. cit., 280.
41 J. Sterling Morton, "Historical Address," in A Commemoration Pamphlet - It Relates to July 4th, 1876, At Nebraska City, Otoe County Nebraska (1876), 20-21.
CHAPTER III
An Overland Train

A new train extending over a green prairie made a striking scene. The big, white, clean, canvass covers and the untarnished blue and red woodwork of the wagons made a brave show.¹

The wagons used were of special design and construction, and built for "the plains transportation business". The tires were wide and heavy; the boxes, high and tight, were made of the best seasoned wood. Over these curved the huge bows. The most common makes of wagons were the Murphy and Espenshied, built in St. Louis, Missouri, and the Studebaker, built at South Bend, Indiana. The Studebaker was considered the easiest running, but more Murphy wagons were used than either of the other makes.²

These great, cumbersome wagons weighing at least fifteen hundred pounds each, were of the thimble skein type. The axles were wooden, but had iron thimbles on the ends which fit into the iron thimbles of the wheel hubs. The wheels were held in place by big linchpins fastened into the ends of the axles. Tar was used for lubricant.³

The amount of freight which one of these wagons carried would vary, of course, according to the type of merchandise. But they were made to haul six thousand pounds or more, and they might be loaded with ten thousand pounds.⁴

¹ Chandless, op. cit., 20.
² Rolfe, op. cit., 281.
⁴ Nebraska City News, April 14, 1860; Sydenham, op. cit., 166; Cox, op. cit., 75.
The bows of the wagon-box were covered by heavy canvas or by several sheets of ducking such as used in army tents. This gave a satisfactory protection from rain to the contents of the wagon.5

A full-fledged train for crossing the plains was made up of twenty-five to twenty-six wagons, or as sometimes stated twenty-five wagons and one mess. At times there was also a reserve mess wagon. There might be one or more provision wagons, an office wagon, and a workshop wagon. The last named unit was stocked with coils of rope, extra tires, jacks, pulleys, wheels, spokes, iron bars, and very often a small forge. A twenty-five wagon train was called a "bull outfit". A train of less than this number of wagons was simply an "outfit". There were many outfits of three, four, eight, ten, and fifteen wagons. And there were trains of thirty, forty, fifty and a hundred wagons. A forty wagon train in single file would stretch over a mile of the trail.6

Oxen, mules, and horses were used for "train power". A conservative estimate states that fully three-fourths of the freight traffic was with oxen. Most all freighting by private individuals was done with ox teams.7

Oxen, though slow, were always reliable, and were the surest and cheapest power, especially for long trips. The transportation of dead weight such as mining and other machinery, stoves, hardware, and salt was done almost always by oxen. Mules were next to oxen for wagon power. Horses had third place; they might be used for a light mess wagon. But

5 Majors, op. cit., 102; Rolfe, op. cit., 281.
6 Root and Connelley, op. cit., 307-308; Chandless, op. cit., 15, 20; Rolfe, op. cit., 282, 284; Majors, op. cit., 102; Hooker, op. cit., 37; Hulbert, op. cit., 190; Young, op. cit., 20, 29; Barns, op. cit., 198.
7 Root and Connelley, op. cit., 304; Bratt, op. cit., 50; Ware, op. cit., 140.
horses did have a part with the train as shall be seen later. Mules were much faster than oxen, and therefore had some advantages over them for trains carrying flour, sugar, bacon, groceries, clothing and dry-goods.8

Oxen gathered their living entirely from the prairie. Feed had to be transported for horses and mules, but cattle would become stronger and fatter during a summer spent on the trail. They might come out of the winter "poor and scrawny", but would return to it "fat and hearty" at the close of the freighting season. If driven properly, oxen would travel 2,000 miles during one season, or an equivalent of making two round trips to Denver from the Missouri River. It is assumed the wagons would be empty on the return trip.9 More will be presented on the subject of feed in another chapter.

Three classes of oxen made up each wagon's team, namely: The wheelers or pole oxen; the swing cattle or pointers; and the leaders.10 The wheelers and leaders were usually old "veterans" that had breathed the smoke of the trail on many a trek. The swing cattle were more or less wild according to the results of the 'breaking' at the base. The team might be composed of native cattle with some Cherokee and Texas long-horns.11

The Texas steer made the best leader when properly broken. He would

8 Root and Connelley, op. cit., 304; Majors, op. cit., 103; Clarke, op. cit., 300.
9 Samuel Bowles, Across the Continent (Springfield, 1865), p. 15; Majors, op. cit., 103.
10 Hooker, op. cit., 30; Bratt, op. cit., 53.
11 Barns, op. cit., 198; Young, op. cit., 26; Bratt, op. cit., 52; An account of the freighting on the Santa Fe trail is outside the scope of this thesis; but just at this point it is of interest to note how the wagon teams were made up on that route. The following quotation is from James F. Meline, Two Thousand Miles on Horseback (New York, 1867), p. 3: "They are remarkable, each wagon team consisting of ten yoke of fine oxen, selected and arranged not only for drawing but for pictorial effect, in sets of twenty, either all black, all white, all spotted, or otherwise marked uniformly."
hold his head high; he was quick on his feet, and with his light and
tapering body and clean cut limbs could run like a horse. 12

Steers were not the only class of cattle used. Cows were sometimes
put into yoke, and they did good work. One freighter has written: "I
never saw a lazy cow in the yoke, but I have seen horribly lazy steers." 13

The number of yoke of oxen to a wagon varied with different freight-
ers. One might use five yoke, another six, another ten, and even twelve
yoke to a wagon were used by some. But six yoke was the customary num-
ber, twelve oxen to a team. 14

The wise freighter would send or take with his train several extra
cattle. In case of lameness or accident to an animal on a team an extra
would be used and no delay on the trail was occasioned. An entire cat-
tle train would number from 320 to 330 animals, including extras. 15

Six span of mules were often used to a wagon, but the more common
number was four. A wagon team of mules was driven with one line. 16

There was a driver to each team, and only a case of illness in a
train would require one driver to handle two teams. It needs no
stretch of imagination to see the difficulty that was encountered in
such circumstances. For under normal conditions, it required the con-
stant attention of a driver to manage one team. Some trains carried
extra teamsters. 17

12 Rolfe, op. cit., 282.
13 T. K. Tyson, "Freighting to Denver," in Proceedings and Collections
of the Nebraska State Historical Society (Lincoln, 1902), Second
Series, V, 256.
208; Sydenham, op. cit., 166; Bentley, op. cit., 47; Chandless, op.
cit., 19; Majors, op. cit., 102.
15 Majors, op. cit., 102.
16 Bentley, op. cit., 47.
17 Bratt, op. cit., 59; Sydenham, op. cit., 166.
AN OVERLAND TRAIN

Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society
During this period it was common practice to have but one wagon to each team. Trail wagons did come into more general use, however, at a later period. The trail wagon system meant the use of more than one wagon, perhaps two or three coupled together, and drawn by one team.¹⁸

A certain degree of order was maintained by the train in motion. The teams trailed each other except in times of Indian hostilities when they might travel two abreast, the roadway permitting. The lead wagon headed the train; the mess wagon brought up the rear. The extra horses and cattle under the care of a herder followed behind the train. Two, three, eight, or ten miles, and perhaps greater distances, separated the trains along the trail. Keeping out of the way of each other avoided the possible mixing of the cattle, helped to prevent stampedes, and allowed for freer and more adequate grazing.¹⁹

Besides the repair tools and extra wagon parts, carried in the workshop wagon when such a unit accompanied a train, other supplies were provided for. Strapped to the running gear of each wagon was an extra pole and one or two extra yokes. In the same manner were carried an extra axle or two, for axles did break occasionally under a heavy pull over a rough road. Contrivances for lifting the wagons always made up part of the repair equipment.²⁰

Each wagon had a water keg fastened on the side. This was "re-filled at every watering place".²¹

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¹⁸ Majors, op. cit., 145.
¹⁹ Ibid.; Clarke, op. cit., 300; Bechdolt, op. cit., 210; Hooker, op. cit., 37.
²⁰ Cox, op. cit., 75; Greeley, op. cit., 23.
²¹ Bruffey, op. cit., 26–27.
A chip sack hung on a hook at the side of the wagon box. During the day the driver filled this with buffalo and cow chips which were used for the camp fire. On the rear axle hung the tar bucket.22

A train could not move without a crew. A crew, indeed it had. What glamour and what color there may have been in those freighting days, glamour and color that reaches down to this modern time, was created by the men who were the life, the soul, and the spirit of the enterprise. It was created by the men who bravely faced the toil, hardships and dangers on an overland freight-train on an overland prairie trail.

First in order of the trainmen stood the wagon-master, or wagon-boss. Other names were given to this official, such as, manager, captain, train-boss, and "bull-wagon" boss. But withal the wagon-master was a shrewd, wiry frontiersman.23 His work will be described presently.

Next in line came the assistant wagon-master, and the commissary. The work of the latter was to manage the financial affairs of the train, to look after some of the internal arrangements, and to issue provisions. Not all trains carried a commissary. Generally the wagon-boss served also in the capacity of commissary.24

Then there were the drivers or teamsters who were most commonly known as "Bull Whackers". An account of this important group and of other personnel will be given greater space later in this and in the following chapter. Other members of the crew included the cook, herds-

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22 Ware, op. cit., 140; Cox, op. cit., 75.
23 Bruffey, op. cit., 26; Hulbert, op. cit., 190; Barns, op. cit., 200; Clarke, op. cit., 300; Cox, op. cit., 75.
24 Chandless, op. cit., 14, 15.
men, extra drivers, and the messenger. The work of the messenger was one of great peril and danger, for he often travelled alone. Back and forth between the wagon trains in their journey across the open prairies, he carried dispatches and fulfilled his errands.25

One of the lads that rode the trail of those days as messenger boy was "Little Bill Cody". He later became "Bill Cody the Wagon-master".26

The wagon-master had complete control of the train. His work was strenuous. His word was law; once on the trail the train-boss was permitted to use any measure to enforce his orders. He carried a revolver or two and these settled any and all disputes. The wagon-master's task might be likened to that of a ship's captain. His commands were to be obeyed and this on a moment's notice, especially in hostile Indian ter-

25 Nebraska City News, May 14, 1859; Barns, op. cit., 198; Majors, op. cit., 102-103, 243.
26 Majors, op. cit., 243-244, 245. This same reference includes the following interesting account: "...a handsome, wiry little lad came to me, accompanied by his good mother, and said that he had her permission to take a position under me as a messenger boy. I gave him the place...he had to sign the pay-roll each month by making the sign of a cross, his mark. He drew a man's pay, and earned every dollar of it.

"He always had his mother come to get his pay, and when one day he was told by the paymaster to come and 'make his mark and get his money', his face flushed as he saw tears come into his mother's eyes and heard her low uttered words:

"'Oh, Willie! if you would only learn to write, how happy I would be.'

"Educational advantages in those early days were crude in the extreme, and Little Billy's chances to acquire knowledge were few, but from that day, when he saw the tears in his mother's eyes at his inability to write his name, he began to study hard and to learn to write...

"...his acquiring the art of penmanship got him into heaps of trouble, as 'Will Cody,' 'Little Billy,' Billy the Boy Messenger,' and 'William Frederic Cody' were written with the burnt end of a stick upon tents, wagon-covers, and all tempting places, while he carved upon wagon-body, ox-yoke, and where he could find suitable wood for his pen-knife to cut into, the name he would one day make famous."
An enumeration of the duties of a wagon-master would include the selecting of camp sites, the choosing of watering places, directing the formation of the corral, supervising the herding, giving the yoking and driving orders, the inspecting of river and stream crossings, the locating of feeding grounds and the shoeing of the cattle when the wagoners could not do it.

To successfully discharge such responsibilities, care, skill and judgment were required. The location for the camp should be found on high ground not too close to timber, brush, river or creek, or too near to "sudden hills or depressions in adjoining ground". Such locations helped to avoid any ambush by the Indians. In order to accomplish this work the wagon-boss must ride ahead of the train. "It was a dangerous task" when redskins were on the war-path, and the train boss did effect often a hasty retreat to his wagons. Some of these masters became skilled warriors.

The wagon-boss and the assistant wagon-boss were generally mounted on sure, fast animals. Mules were used as a rule, but horses and broncho ponies oftentimes were supplied.

The work of the assistant wagon-boss was to carry out the instructions of his chief. He would ride at one end of the train, "while the master was at the other..."

Discipline held an important place in the management of a train crew. If the men would not cooperate, dismissal became the certain reward.

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27 Bentley, op. cit., 47-48; Majors, op. cit., 104; Sydenham, op. cit., 171; Barns, op. cit., 202; Young, op. cit., 19; Ware, op. cit., 141.
28 Chandless, op. cit., 14; Barns, op. cit., 199, 201.
29 Bratt, op. cit., 54; Barns, op. cit., 200, 203; Bechdolt, op. cit., 209.
30 Rolfe, op. cit., 282; Barns, op. cit., 200; Cox, op. cit., 75.
31 Majors, op. cit., 104-105.
32 Sydenham, op. cit., 170; Chandless, op. cit., 32.
Constant guarding against theft was one of the main duties of the master. It was not an unknown thing for a disgruntled driver to have attempted an escape from the train by stealing a mule to ride. One such would-be thief soon found himself tied to a wagon. On one occasion it became necessary for a wagon-master to crush a "bull whacker" revolt at the point of a gun. A bunch of toughs had gotten into the train as drivers and when near the end of a westward journey planned to desert and strand the outfit. The rebellion once subdued no more trouble took place; and the teamsters continued their favorite song, "I am bound for California with my banjo on my knee". No coward could have held for long the position of wagon-master.

There were good and bad train bosses. Some were severe and abusive, and a mutinous spirit was repeatedly the result of ill harmony between teamsters and masters. But many were kind and considerate, oftentimes risking their lives for the men and the property in their care, and "doing an almost incredible amount of work".

Of one successful wagon-master it is recorded:

"He had always a kind word for those who were sick, and a joke or two for the rest, and a way of keeping men to work by a truth said in jest. 'It's no affair of mine', he'd say, when we were in Indian country, 'if you lose the cattle, they're not my cattle, only you'll be left here to starve. I've powder and lead, and my rifle, and can get back at any time;' and so he got work done, when rating might have failed."38

33 Ware, op. cit., 141.
34 Chandless, op. cit., 26-27.
35 Barns, op. cit., 205-206.
37 Sydenham, op. cit., 170; Bratt, op. cit., 59-60; Chandless, op. cit., 14.
38 Chandless, op. cit., 14.
Drivers on the ox team trains received "the euphonious name of 'Bull Whackers.'" Drivers of mule teams were known as Mule-Skinners. These men may have been given no high rating in the aristocracy of frontier "socialdom", but they had, nevertheless, a "pride of profession". Whether they figured on the list of the elite it did not matter; they were too busy performing their tasks, tasks which would be recorded later in their country's history.

The age of the men ranged from twenty to forty-five years. They were "as rough and wild-looking as their teams" but less awkward. The wildness of the driver's appearance was produced, for the most part, by his unkempt exterior. One wore a huge beard of such length as to reach "half-way down his chest" except when fastened up by hairpins.

The "bull whacker" had his own style of dress. He wore a broad brimmed hat which usually had some strange device attached to the crown. The flannel shirts were bright red and blue in color; the pants ran down the inside of heavy, high-legged boots, and sticking into the top of one of these would be a sheath or bowie-knife. The knife might be stuck under the belt, per choice. A well-fitted belt of cartridges encircled the waist from which hung one or two large 'colt type' revolvers always in trim. Aside from the heavy pistol at the hip a shot gun or rifle made up the balance of the "bull whacker's" ordnance. Of course, if metallic cartridges were not used a powder

39 Cox, op. cit., 75; Barns, op. cit., 198.
40 Bratt, op. cit., 50.
41 Branch, op. cit., 519.
42 Bratt, op. cit., 52-53.
43 Pelzer, op. cit., 144.
44 Chandless, op. cit., 69.
45 Cox, op. cit., 75.
46 Chandless, op. cit., 20; Bratt, op. cit., 51.
47 Marvin, op. cit., 229.
48 Bratt, op. cit., 51.
49 Rolfe, op. cit., 282; Sydenham, op. cit., 166.
flask, cap box, and bullet box increased the necessary equipment. The
men moulded their own bullets. Sufficient "ammunition for the ex-
igencies of the trip" made up part of the supplies of the train.

The very symbol of the "bull whacker" was his huge whip, for it
is the whip that gave the "bull whacker" his name. It became an in-
separable part of himself and of his job. The stock of the "persuader"
measured from eighteen inches to three feet in length; the lash contain-
ed from fifteen to thirty feet of braided rawhide which tapered from a
thickness of several inches in circumference six feet from the stock to
a "ribbon like thong" near the end on which was fastened the buckskin
popper. An extra supply of buckskin to repair the lash and to make new
poppers found place in the "bull whacker's" outfit.

One prominent freighting firm provided each man with a pocket
Bible and Hymn Book. These were hoped to provide "protection against
moral contamination".

The entire outfit of a driver cost from thirty to fifty dollars.
Every man needed a pair of blankets, and to each were issued two
first class heavy blankets "such as does one good to look at in cold
weather". Stealing another's blankets was considered a shameful trick,
but not dishonesty; for they were the property of the freighter, the men
having simply the use of them. The "bull whackers" used various methods
to guard against loss of their blankets. Marking with thread became use-

50 Marvin, op. cit., 229.
51 Sydenham, op. cit., 166.
52 John Kearnes, "Nebraskan Recalls Thrilling Days as Bull Whacker on
Early Freighter" in Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star, January 17,
1937; Bechdolt, op. cit., 209-210; Rolfe, op. cit., 283; Bratt, op.
cit., 51.
53 Nebraska News, February 27, 1858; Cox, op. cit., 75.
54 Marvin, op. cit., 229.
55 Ibid.
less, for it could be too conveniently pulled out. Rubbing gunpowder into the blanket and then igniting it proved a sure method in marking, for it was almost impossible to alterate such a brand. Another plan consisted of cutting out a design from a corner, keeping the piece thus removed for identification.56

The vigorous outdoor life of the trainmen helped to keep them fresh and full of health. Sickness was a rare exception; it was not the rule. There were times, to be sure, when the dreadful cholera might visit a train and before whose attacks but few men escaped. But all in all the teamsters on the plains enjoyed a health as good as that enjoyed by any group of men laboring any other place. They were strong, active, and robust, "good shots, and ready for any emergency", even to a round with hostile redskins.57

One contemporary placed the "bull whackers" in a triple category, namely: few good, some medium, others very bad.58 Other contemporaries were even more expressive in their description of those men with the shooting-irons, the long whips and lariats: "...most of them, ignorant and ready to fight at the least provocation...and I've seen mule-drivers that looked far less intelligent than the much abused mule..." but adds, "...not all so, of course, but occasionally."59 "...the toughest individuals on earth, the professional bull whackers, who, according to their own minds, were very important personages. Their

56 Chandless, op. cit., 10,17.
57 Majors, op. cit., 103; Bratt, op. cit., 56.
58 Bratt, op. cit., 52.
59 Bentley, op. cit., 48.
good qualities were few..."60 Many were "...genteel sharks, plenty of whiskey..."61 But Mr. Bruffey62 continues: "fine, pleasant boy companions" they were.

While some contemporary writers, "bull whackers" themselves, have portrayed thus the drivers of the overland freight wagons, other contemporary writers, themselves "bull whackers", are more charitable, even unto praise. "...we were a jolly set of fellows, especially when we had the right kind of a boss, but it was not always sunshine and pleasure. We were often called upon to witness suffering and death."63

"Many of them were finely educated; some of them graduates of eastern colleges, and most generally their hearts were as large as the hearts of the oxen they drove."64

A "bull whacker" would go any length to aid a companion in trouble; his generosity was outstanding to a fault, and although skilled in the art of enduring hardship and suffering he was "as gentle as a woman" toward those of his number who might be ill or injured. Tough and wild looking as he was, beneath the coarse, rough exterior lived a noble man.65

60 Young, op. cit., 25.
61 Bruffey, op. cit., 19; Mr. Riegel, op. cit., 424, paints a vivid word picture of a notorious character of those days: "...Calamity Jane (Martha Jane Canary), the best known woman on the plains during the '60s and later. Big, coarse, strong, vulgar, lewd, promiscuous, she had to have all these traits in noble proportions to attain prominence in an age when such characteristics were common. Most of the time she wore men's clothes and associated entirely with men, doing nearly everything that they did and some that they didn't. She could swear with the best, chew a sizable plug of tobacco, and drink most men under the table. Probably at one time she drove for Russell, Majors and Waddell as a 'bull whacker'."
62 Ibid.
64 Cox, op. cit., 76.
65 Ibid.
In the business of life on the plains as in any business there were positions of trust and responsibility at the top, positions gained and held by men whose outward appearance and questionable deportment presented an almost impossible situation.66

From the pen of one contemporary, not a teamster but one who had by his constant contact with thousands of trainmen an opportunity to know by personal observation, comes this testimony:

They were "...a class...that liked fun, enjoyed freedom, despised luxury, and took no note of danger or privation; and they were not of the dumb and stupid class of society. Many were educated, some of them were gifted."67

Their's was a rough life, a hard life, a dangerous life, and withal a romantic life. They fill a place in history that is due to those who dared to venture, who dared to risk, who dared to fight, who dared to die that by so doing they might ever guide, ever urge, and ever point an overland train prairieward.

66 Barns, op. cit., 206.
67 Ware, op. cit., 142.
CHAPTER IV

Living on the Trail

Slow progress was made on the trail the first day out from the freighting base. Some last minute branding and yoking of unbroken steers might delay an early start. Although several days had been spent in taming most of the wild cattle, the men had plenty of trouble to get a train of wagons under way at the beginning of a journey. The train on which Mr. Bratt bull-whacked had two wagon upsets the first day out and when night came only a mile of the trail had been covered.

One "bull-whacker's" first attempt at driving ended in a ludicrous failure; it ended, "in fact, in a double knot, every steer having its feet over every chain, and most of the yokes turned upside down."

Good headway on the road depended much on the ability and experience of the wagon-master; and the cooperation of every man in the performance of his duty aided greatly in successfully moving the heavy train along the trail. Under favorable conditions ten, twelve or fifteen miles would be made each day. At the beginning the distance was more often but three, five or seven miles each day. If there was a good stretch of road and "a necessity for rapid movement" trains were

1 Chandless, op. cit., 22; Barns, op. cit., 198.
2 Bratt, op. cit., 55.
3 Chandless, op. cit., 22.
4 Majors, op. cit., 103.
5 Ibid.; Young, op. cit., 40.
known to have traveled twenty miles a day, but this was much faster
traveling than could be maintained for any length of time. On the re-
turn trips with empty wagons the teams could average twenty miles each
day and no injury would be done thereby to the animals.⁶

The condition of the roads and the heat governed the speed which
at best was snail-like, for the pace of the oxen seldom exceeded two
miles an hour.⁸ But although the movement westwardly was slow, the
trains were moving surely "on toward the mountains."¹⁰

Most of the freighters ran their trains seven days in the week. Only
a few gave orders to their wagon-masters to camp on Sundays. This plan
was dependent, however, on locating the camp near good grass and water;
but generally the wagon-masters managed not to have their trains so situ-
ated on Saturday evening and thus evaded the rule. A day of rest for the
men and animals had its advantages, perhaps; for about as good time was
made by those who halted as was made by those who drove seven days a
week. But on the other hand when a train camped for Sunday, there was
not much rest for the crew; for nearly always there were odd jobs to be
done or if not, the day was spent oftentimes in dissipation.¹¹

From twenty-eight to forty-five days on the road were needed to put
a wagon-train from the Missouri River into Denver. This was the time
needed for oxen, and to cover the distance in twenty-eight was fast travel
indeed. Mule-trains covered the same road in about three weeks time. A
train would spend seventy to seventy-five days on the trail between the
Missouri River and Salt Lake City.¹²

⁶ Majors, op. cit., 103.
⁷ Marvin, op. cit., 228.
⁸ Greeley, op. cit., 24.
⁹ Chandless, op. cit., 55.
¹⁰ Sydenham, op. cit., 167.
¹¹ Clarke, op. cit., 302; Chandless, op. cit., 16.
¹² Marvin, op. cit., 229; Rolfe, op. cit., 234; Branch, op. cit., 519;
The most customary plan of march was two drives each day. An early morning drive, usually made before breakfast, ended at eight, nine-thirty or probably ten o'clock. If breakfast was taken first the drive might extend until eleven o'clock. But in any case the morning camp depended on feed and water for the cattle, and the condition of the weather and favorable camping grounds. During the rest period the cattle were unyoked, watered, and herded on the grass, and the men had their first meal of the day.

The steers were driven into the wagon corral and yoked for the second drive at about three o'clock in the afternoon. The time of starting the second drive was governed, however, by the heat and weather conditions. Five, six, seven, and possibly eight miles were traveled during each two daily drives. The oxen suffered much from the heat of the sun during the summer, and great benefit came from making early morning drives. On the trail between Julesburg and the North Platte, near Court House Rock, the teams had to travel some forty miles without water. It was possible that on this stretch the trains moved at night when the cattle would travel much faster than by day. Headless barrels were sunk in the quick-sands at places along the Platte and water secured by this method. The wagons went into evening camp at sundown. When there was no immediate danger of an Indian attack the wagons were scattered

13 Rolfe, op. cit., 282; Barns, op. cit., 200; Marvin, op. cit., 228.
14 Bratt, op. cit., 54,55; Marvin, op. cit., 228; Barns, op. cit., 200.
16 Lyon, op. cit., 266.
17 Clarke, op. cit., 302.
18 Young, op. cit., 40.
oftentimes along the trail at great distances from one another. The first wagon might reach camp an hour before the last wagon would arrive and "that hour might change twilight into dark." The camp fire of the leading mess would be kindled and the coffee would be on while the last wagon was still two miles away. 19

When possible no two trains camped together, for generally water and grass were not sufficient for so many animals at one location. Also the confusion which would be caused by the cattle of the trains becoming mixed was thus avoided. 20 It is well to remember here that the animals of two average sized trains numbered better than half a thousand head.

The camping grounds of a freight-train was easily distinguished from the camping grounds of an emigrant-train by the number of camp fire remains. The camp fires of thefreighting men were "fewer and larger." A train of forty freight wagons would have no more than half a dozen fires. 21

At night the wagons formed an enclosure which was oblong, oval or egg shaped. This enclosed space was called a corral. 22 The word corral comes from the Spanish language and means a yard or an enclosure for live stock.

The making of the corral was a greater task than one might generally think. The wagon-master would ride to the center of the location which he had selected earlier in the afternoon for the evening camp. The lead team would turn to the right and make a large half circle; the second team would turn to the left and make a large half circle. These two

19 Chandless, op. cit., 41.
20 Majors, op. cit., 105.
21 Chandless, op. cit., 37.
22 Majors, op. cit., 102; Young, op. cit., 26.
teams met at the farther side of what was to be the corral. The on coming teams of the train followed the first two in alternate order, the third team turning right, the fourth team turning left, until all the wagons had been drawn into one or the other of the half circles. Each wagon on either side was drawn up close behind each preceding wagon and had its inner front wheel against or close to the outer rear wheel of the preceding wagon. This style of corral, or wagon formation, had the wagon poles or tongues of all the wagons turned outside. The tongues were not on the inside of the enclosure. Should any gaps have been left between the wheels of the wagons the heavy yoke-chains were used to close such openings. Thus, the corral was made a solid cattle yard except for the one or two entrances which were left at the ends. The first two wagons of the corral formation faced each other and were set at a distance of some twenty or thirty feet apart. Likewise, an opening was left between the last two wagons which completed the corral. Through these gaps the steers were driven at time for yoking and teaming up. They were then driven out of the enclosure to their respective wagons. Some freighters would leave but one opening, but whether the corral had one or two openings there were always heavy log chains which closed the gaps when necessary.23

For the first ten or fifteen days on the trail, only the gentle cattle were unyoked. The chains were dropped from the yokes of the wild steers, but they wore their harness until some evidence of subjection appeared. After being unhitched, the oxen were driven to water and then

23 Cox, op. cit., 75; Tyson, op. cit., 259; Bratt, op. cit., 54-55; Marvin, op. cit., 227; Barne, op. cit., 200; Chandlee, op. cit., 15; Young, op. cit., 26; Majors, op. cit., 102.
out to their feed on the prairie. Each wagon's equipment of ox-bows, chains, and yokes were placed inside the corral where all was put in order for the next hitching up exercise. 24

The corral served for many purposes. It was a place in which to yoke the cattle; it was a place for protection from the severe storms that often swept the prairies; it was a place into which the animals could be driven hurriedly on occasions of danger of an Indian attack. When such dangers did threaten, and they often did, all was sheltered within the huge "improvised fort." All the oxen, all the extra cattle, all the night herders' and wagon-bosses' horses and mules, all the equipment, and all the men found defence behind the big wagons that were solidly chained or interlocked together. 25

The Indians' favorite time of attack was in the early morning "when the oxen were being yoked," or in the evening when the train was going into camp. At these two periods of the day the train men were occupied the most and were prepared the least for an attack. During these busy hours the men cook off their revolvers but "placed them where they could easily be reached..." 26

A train of the mammoth white-topped wagons in corral formation presented "a novel and interesting appearance." 27

Inside the wagon circle the "bull whackers" made their camp. 28 Each man had some chores to do. One or two of each mess gathered fuel, another dug the fire trench, another carried the water; all did their part. 29

24 Clarke, op. cit., 300; Rolfe, op. cit., 282; Bratt, op. cit., 53, 55.
25 Tyson, op. cit., 259-260; Cox, op. cit., 75; Barns, op. cit., 200;
Bratt, op. cit., 54-55.
26 Young, op. cit., 49.
27 Nebraska City News, April 14, 1860.
28 Beckdolt, op. cit., 211.
29 Rolfe, op. cit., 282.
The chip sack that hung on the side of the wagon was mentioned in the preceding chapter. During the day the drivers had filled these as they moved along the trail; at night the sacks were "emptied into a common pile." In case no chips had been gathered during the day or an insufficient quantity had been collected the men would hustle out with an old coffee sack and in a few minutes have enough for the camp fire. An old camping site would be "studded with ox-chips" to which all would flock "as eagerly as if to a gold mine." Buffalo chips when dry were preferred to wood, for they maintained "a more even heat," and although they may have lain on the prairie for a number of years they were "in perfect condition for fuel."

Along the Platte River the men gathered driftwood which they carried under the wagon boxes until it dried out sufficiently for use as fuel.

In the third chapter mention is made of the mess wagon which was a unit in most of the trains. Twenty-five freight wagons and one mess wagon made a full train. Some outfits carried a "reserve mess wagon." Oftentimes a cook was one of the personnel; but if no person especially designated "the cook" accompanied the train, each mess would chose one of its number who was fitted best to serve in that capacity. The cook of a mess had no duties in camp aside from keeping the cooking equipment in order and preparing the meals. Six to eight men formed a mess, or there might be ten men to each mess.

31 Chandless, op. cit., 122, 64.
32 Ibid.
33 Majors, op. cit., 149.
34 Bratt, op. cit., 60-61.
35 Rolfe, op. cit., 282.
36 Young, op. cit., 29.
37 Majors, op. cit., 104.
38 Ibid.
One "bull whacker" has left a record which lists his messmates. He writes that it was a relic of the rest of the train's crew, "and comprised a pretty hotchpotch." There were "four Germans, always called Dutchmen in the West, two Irishmen, two Americans, a Mexican, and myself, the solitary Englishman of the whole camp." 40

The cooking equipment consisted of skillets, or bake-pans which resembled covered spiders without the handles; two or three "old-fashioned" iron kettles; coffee pots, frying pans, a coffee mill, and a big "combination dish and bread pan." Each mess was provided also with an ax, a spade and several six-gallon water kegs. 41 The outfit might include a sheet or cast iron stove, or perhaps just a bake oven if no stove was carried. 42

The tableware included iron knives and forks, spoons, tin plates, and quart cups. 43

The mess wagon was stocked generally with liberal supplies of bacon (in the rough), flour, coffee, tea, molasses, dried fruit, baking powder, salt, pepper, corn meal, beans and crackers. 44

By a glance at the list of provisions just enumerated one need not guess long on what made up a complete bill of fare for the "bull whackers" on the trail. Strong coffee most likely was served always, and the enlightened cook with his coffee pot would waste no time in getting down to the draw for his water supply before the thirsty oxen plunged into the pool. The men endeavored to forget that in all probability another train's cattle had waded in the water only a few hours before. 45

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 21; Young, op. cit., 23-24.
42 Clarke, op. cit., 301.
44 Ibid.; Barns, op. cit., 200-201; Maddox, op. cit., 296; Clarke, op. cit., 301.
"Bacon was the reliable meat," and flapjacks, beans, crackers, and sour dough fried in a skillet and flooded with molasses was the most regular menu for the cook's guests." The dough was prepared also by placing a large chunk of it into a lid covered skillet and all buried in a heap of live coals for fifteen minutes. This method produced a fine looking loaf of bread "browned to a tempting color. When eaten warm, it was very palatable, but when cold, only bullwhackers could digest it." To complain about the food did no good; there was nothing better. Occasionally a cook succeeded in baking a good loaf of bread, but because of his vanity he might give so much away to passers-by that the boys of the mess were left without.\textsuperscript{46}

Bean soup was a luxury, and dried-apples were served for dessert two or three times a week.\textsuperscript{47} But regardless of what the cook had prepared, one thing was certain, the men were always ready to eat, and it was a welcome sound when the shout of "grub pile" was heard; the hearty "bull whackers" wasted no time in falling to "like a pack of hungry wolves."\textsuperscript{48}

The menu had some variety at times. Fish were caught; antelope, deer and buffalo were hunted.

"The meat of a fat four-year-old cow is as juicy and tender as the best beef, and with a specially delicate flavour of its own. A young bull you may grumble over and just eat; an old bull of five years or more you positively cannot; I have nearly pulled out my teeth in the attempt; if you boil the meat to rags, the rags are still shreds of leather..."\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46} Young, \textit{op. cit.}, 23-24; Maddox, \textit{op. cit.}, 296; Barns, \textit{op. cit.}, 200-201; Clarke, \textit{op. cit.}, 301.
\textsuperscript{47} Chandless, \textit{op. cit.}, 26; Young, \textit{op. cit.}, 23.
\textsuperscript{48} Charles Raber, "Personal Recollections of Life on the Plains from 1860 - 1868" in \textit{Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society} 1923-1925 (Topeka, 1925), XVI, 318.
\textsuperscript{49} Bratt, \textit{op. cit.}, 61.
\textsuperscript{50} Chandless, \textit{op. cit.}, 65.
Milk at a fair price was sold to the trainmen by the few squatters and ranchmen along the trail. Of one "bull whacker" Mr. Marvin writes: "He was my 'partner' on that trip, slept with me under the same blankets, and a truer or more loyal fellow never cracked a whip or stole a chicken from a ranchman." And Mr. Chandless our English "bull whacker" confesses: "...stole some water-melons, not quite ripe, but they were delicious, and did me a world of good; one wants fresh vegetables and fruit occasionally."

Sometimes the flapjack did not flap, but instead would land on the side of the skillet "and go to smash." The smoke from the bacon and fire filled the face and it was then the cook sang a favorite driver's song "How to Turn a Flapjack," or to change the tune he sang "Ouch-Ouchy, Wouchy-Skouchy"; the greater the suffocation the better the cook performed his rendition.

Perhaps the fuel was wet; the meal then provided was crackers, molasses and cold water. This delighted the cook, for his duties were greatly minimized on such occasions. But one time when the cook fed his mess hard bread, declaring it was too wet to cook, a "bull whacker" objected and volunteered his blanket "to be held over the fire while some 'slap-jacks' (pancakes) were fried. All vociferously voted this to be magnanimous, but by mistake, some one else's blanket was taken. Myself and another stood one on each side of the fire...with the blanket over our shoulders, eyes, nose, and mouth so full of smoke we could hardly see to swear."
The cook toasted the coffee each evening, and made all other needful preparations for the breakfast of the following day. The breakfast menu varied to the extent of having coffee, and fried bacon sandwiched between thick cornmeal bread covered with syrup. 57

When a train was in camp day or night the animals were never left without herders or a guard of one or two men. If no extra men as herders accompanied the train the drivers took turns, each man guarding two hours out of the twenty-four. Sometimes the drivers would have to go on duty only every other night, but in any event all arrangements were made between the men and the wagon-master. 58

Regular herders with a train had no other duties than to care for the animals when the train was in camp unless for some special reason the cattle were corralled. This task kept them busy ten or twelve hours every day, the time divided about evenly with the midday and night herding. If the night guard was extra long or extra taxing for any reason the day herding would be done by a couple of the "bull whackers." This plan permitted the herders to receive their needed rest. 59

Immediately following the unyoking of the oxen in the evening the herders drove them to water and then to grass. But as soon as supper was ready a couple of "bull whackers" would be detailed for herding while the night guards ate their evening meal. Supper finished they would take charge of the animals until time for corraling the following morning. If no Indians had been sighted near, the stock might be

57 Ibid., 21-22; Rolfe, op. cit., 282-283; Bratt, op. cit., 52.
58 Majors, op. cit., 104.
59 Bratt, op. cit., 55; Barns, op. cit., 201.
taken a little farther than usual from the camp if better grass could be
found. 60

It was necessary often to drive the oxen to the better grass, for
"they were too tired to look for themselves," and tall grass was a de-
light for the herders for it kept the cattle from straying very far. 61

The herders were mounted, there being with every train several
"plains ponies for herding and extra riding." Sometimes horses were
used, or perhaps four or five mules were with the train for that pur-
pose. 62

"When there were no wheels to fix, tires to tighten, boxes to wedge,
oxen to shoe," or wagons to grease the "bull whackers" in camp spent the
leisure time in various ways. Some washed and mended their clothing;
some slept; some played cards; some wrote letters or read books and
magazines; others braided whips, sang and told stories. If it was a
poker game, "usually freeze-out, the men played with plug tobacco cut
up into small cubes." 63

A "bull whacker" who did not drink, chew tobacco, smoke, swear, or
play cards was called a "goody-goody" by his fellows, and by them would
be reminded that his "early education had been sadly neglected." 64

Mr. Bratt 65 made several resolutions for himself when he entered
the bull whacking profession. He resolved not to gamble, use tobacco,
drink, or swear. For the first sixty miles on the trail he kept his
resolutions, much, he writes, "to the disgust of my fellow bull-whackers."

60 Young, op. cit., 40; Bratt, op. cit., 55.
61 Chandless, op. cit., 121, 90.
62 Majors, op. cit., 102; Barns, op. cit., 200; Rolfe, op. cit., 282.
63 Hooker, op. cit., 38; Bratt, op. cit., 55.
64 Bratt, op. cit., 53.
65 Ibid., 51, 53-54, 78, 56.
But one early morning when he was yoking his team one of the steers stepped on his foot and for a split second Bratt forgot his resolution. The news of the incident spread rapidly through the camp, the men cheering and commending him highly for his good start. Mr. Bratt states that he was just as busy quietly asking the Lord to forgive him and to help him from any future repetition. He seemed to have had a better standing with his mates after that day, but he was still in their eyes a tenderfoot for not adopting other of their vices. Mr. Bratt had some difficulty in the following weeks with his resolution not to swear, and he was tried especially when his wagon would become lodged in a mud hole or in the deep sand.

The seasoned "bull whackers" of a train had considerable sport at the expense of any tenderfoot. They would wager that nine times out of ten a piece of his trousers, from a distance of twelve feet, could be shot away without disturbing the skin.66 No doubt the anxiety of the tenderfoot centered about the possible result of the one shot out of the ten that was not guarantied. Another trick played on the tenderfoot was to have him stoop over while a "bull whacker," an ace of the whip, took a position several feet away and to the rear. The problem at hand was to extract a piece of the greenhorn's trousers without causing any serious damage to the skin beneath.67

After the evening meal came the time for song and story. The men who had been among the Indians could spin the bravest yarns. Many of the drivers were good singers and these joined in familiar songs as the crew sat about the buffalo chip camp fires and gazed into the light of the dying embers.68

66 Young, op. cit., 25.
67 Kearnes, Lincoln Journal, op. cit.
68 Marvin, op. cit., 229-230; Rolfe, op. cit., 283; Chandless, op. cit., 21,41.
"Have you an eye for the beaten track,
The old hoof and the young?
Come name me the drivers of yesterday,
Sing me the songs they sung."69

The boys at times would stage a "stag dance"; occasionally an emigrant train would be encamped not far away, and the women would lend their help to an evening's entertainment. If perchance an old time fiddler was one of the party the amusement might be unique.70

One of the early "bull whackers" who drove on a freight-train in 1855 has written a version of a common camp wrangle as might have happened at any time, at any place, on any overland outfit. The scene is apparently one around a camp fire after the supper hour. A mess is visited by a member from another section of the train. His nickname is Woodpecker. "Surnames were not much in vogue with us..."71

"'Now give us another drink of coffee.'
"'All gone, Woodpecker.'
"'Well, some water then.'
"'Not a drop left.'
"'Then I'll go round to our mess. Good night.'
"'Good night, Woodpecker,' from all, una voce.
"'Oh, here's a nice state of things,' cries one of our cooks, 'how are we to get breakfast, and not a drop of water to do it with? Whose turn is it?'
"'Oh; I went for water this evening,' cries one. 'And I for wood,' cries another; and that great shirk, Moran, slips away to his waggon.
"'Oh, well, if none of you'll go, it is no affair of ours,' says the cook, 'we can do as well without coffee as the balance, can't we, Tom (to his sub)? I know No. 2 mess'll give us a drop.'
"'Call me up first thing, and I'll go,' says Howard.
"'No, we've had plenty of that; you'd have had no breakfast this morning, if some one hadn't lugged you right out. Won't any one go?'
"'I'll go,' says Dutch John, the most willing man in the camp, who never talks about his turn, or grumbles that his bread and bacon is less than another man's.
"'It's too bad Dutch John should have to go, he brought wood and water both this evening,' says another, but never offers to go himself.
"'Come along, William,' says John, to myself, 'we'll go together,' -- for John and I were great chums.

69 Piper, op. cit., 55.
70 Marvin, op. cit., 229-230.
71 Chandless, op. cit., 41.
"'Oh, William,' says Nemahaw, [the cook] insinuatingly, 'if you are going, you may as well take another keg.'

'Well, I guess I will take Mat's keg: we shall want some water in the waggon, as we go along to morrow.'

'Oh, that's just like you, William,' say two or three bitterly, 'always thinking of the waggon and yourself.'

'Go to; ---- the waggon doesn't drink any of the water, nor I much. Don't we always give a drink to any one who wants? You'd have been thirsty enough on Tuesday, if we had had none. Last time I trusted to you there wasn't a drop, and I drank out of a rut in the road, and afterwards of that putrid Vermillion Creek. Bah! It was worse than Croton oil.'

'Oh, make a speech now, you're a lawyer.'

'I'll give you more law than water to night, you may swear to it; make that idle dog Moran bring water if you want it brought.'

'Return of Moran, glaring savagely at me, foaming at his mouth, putting his hand on his big knife, as he always does when there's a chance of a quarrel, and trying to see if I have my revolver about me. Failing in this he keeps quiet, and Dutch John and I go off tranquilly with our kegs.'

Mr. Alexander Majors, for a time one of the most important of the overland freighters, always endeavored to hold high ideals before the hundreds of men in his employ.

He tried to "impress upon their minds the necessity of the purity of life, of honest purposes, of high aspirations, and a remembrance of mother's teaching at the old home." He required that the men refrain from the use of profane language. Mr. Majors desired to send the boys to their homes "better, rather than worse," for having worked in his company.73

Because of Mr. Major's rule on the use of profane language, a song originated which in all probability was written by one of his teamsters. It became very popular among the men on the trail. Two of the verses are given here.

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72 Ibid., 45-47.
73 Cox, op. cit., 76.
"I'll tell you how it is when
You first get on the road;
You have an awkward team and
A very heavy load.
You have to whip and holler, but
Swear upon the sly.
You're in for it then, boys,
Root hog or die."

"We arrived at Denver City the Twenty-first of June.
The people were surprised to
See us there so soon.
But we are good bullwhackers,
On whom you may rely.
We go it on the principal
Of root hog or die."74

The sleeping accommodations for the crew varied with different outfits; in fact, the arrangements were left usually for the men to work out for themselves. Some carried tents which added considerable comfort, but the surest and driest bed was in a big freight wagon. If it was loaded with coffee, rice or the like, so much the better, for the bed was more even. But the most common practice was to sleep on the ground under the wagons the weather permitting.75 The "bed was mother earth, a rubber blanket and buffalo robe the mattress, two pairs of blankets the covering. Heaven's canopy the roof; the stars our silent sentinels."76

There were places along the route, however, where the camping grounds did not provide beds of roses. At least one "bull whacker" thought to describe the situation by explaining that the roses had been picked and that only the stickers remained. Even the oxen suffered some discomfort for oftentimes they would have large "pancakes" of cacti "sticking to their sides when they got up."77 A "bull whacker" on the trail July 30, 1855, 

74 Tyson, op. cit., "Letter."
75 Chandless, op. cit., 37, 41; Clarke, op. cit., 300; Rolfe, op. cit., 283.
76 Young, op. cit., 40.
77 Lyon, op. cit., 266.
wrote of that night in his diary, "slept very badly; rough bed, and cold, too." 78

The freighters were brave men and honest men, too, but they would steal; they would steal, when the weather was cold, a warm bed from a steer. If the steer would permit a man to lie at his side and not move, all well and good. But if not, out went the steer and the "bull whacker" curled up in his place. 79

A very amusing incident is related by a driver who always slept with one of his oxen. He relied on the animal to awaken him should any undue commotion take place in the camp, for the ox would move or get up. One night, however, the "alarm clock" did not work.

"I always slept leaning against one of the oxen; the creature was warm, a condition not to be overlooked during cold weather on the bleak plains. Then, in case of a stampede I would awaken when the ox got up. On this night, however, I was dead asleep and slipped to the ground without awakening when the ox got up. What did awaken me I never knew, but have always believed it was the hand of Providence, for when I opened my eyes a large gray wolf was standing not more than a dozen feet from me. I could feel my hair raise, and it went up quicker than a silk umbrella, too. I had no gun, not even a pocket-knife. I grabbed my hat, flourished it wildly about, and yelled at the top of my voice. Frightened at the sudden action and noise, the creature fled. I was not slow in getting out of that and looking up my oxen." 80

The work and program of the herders has been outlined, but besides the herders there were other men who were on night duty. They were the camp guards. Three or four men detailed for this work watched the first half of the night, when another group of equal number stood guard until daylight. Each mess took a full night's guard dividing the time and alternating the men. The camp was constantly "on a war footing," and in times of immediate danger the camp guards as well as the night herders were doubled. The guard was maintained regardless of weather conditions. 81

78 Chandless, op. cit., 23.
79 Tyson, op. cit., 260.
80 Lyon, op. cit., 267.
81 Cox, op. cit., 75; Bratt, op. cit., 70; Chandless, op. cit., 15-16, 39, 41.
Even during the day when hostile Indians were reported to be in the vicinity extra scouts were sent ahead of the train and the wagons were held close together especially in rough country.\(^82\)

Indians on the offensive troubled the freighters after nightfall. For them to kill a herder was not uncommon, and they repeatedly drove off the cattle and caused stampedes.\(^83\)

It is of interest to note here that the sense-organs of the mule were extremely quick to detect the approach of Indians. Many times the mules, oxen and horses also but in a less degree, warned the camp of the presence of Indians. They would snort and struggle frantically to get loose and to make their escape.\(^84\)

Herders were to be ever on the alert for a possible stampede of the animals, and ready at a second's notice to spring into action and to drive the herd into the wagon corral.\(^85\)

To fill the saddle as a herder with a freight-train required courage, skill and resourcefulness. The unexpected was possible always. Mr. Rolfe has pictured the night herder at work and his brief description is included here.

"At the camp for the night the cattle were allowed to graze at will until well filled and inclined to lie down. Then the herder rides gently around them, driving them to a center and bunching them close as possible without crowding, riding slowly and quietly around them during the night, gently whistling and singing if the herd seemed restless, always guarding against a stampede which sometimes happened. In every herd there are leaders, and when a stampede from any cause occurs, the whole herd spring to their feet at the same instant, the leaders dashing off with the whole herd following. Then comes the time for the herder to show his nerve and courage, when he knows that a gopher hole, a

\(^{82}\) Bratt, op. cit., 60.
\(^{83}\) Hadley, op. cit., 278.
\(^{84}\) Chandless, op. cit., 102.
\(^{85}\) Marcy, op. cit., 42.
broken saddle girth, or a fall meant sudden death in his effort to reach the front at one side of the leaders, and with yells and pistol shots turn the front and get them running in a circle until their fright subsided. The herder generally succeeded, but not always. The writer remembers of one herd that stampeded during a bad storm, one-half being lost and a few found, days after, forty miles from the camp from which they started.86

The herders and guards knew the hour of the night, when there was a clear sky, by the position of the big dipper; the Great Bear was their only clock.87 At three or three-thirty in the morning, or at the first appearance of the new day, a herder would ride to the camp and call the wagon-master. The wagon-master would get up and pound on each wagon to awaken the men. He then would mount his mule or horse and help bring in the animals.88 "Roll out! Roll out! Cattle in the corral" soon was heard and that meant for the teamsters to turn out and for the herders to turn in.89 Even a bed in an old freight wagon was welcomed by the night riders.90

The corral gaps were guarded by the wagon-boss, his assistant and by the extra men while the drivers were busy finding their teams.91 The space inside the corral of a forty wagon train measured about thirty by fifty yards. There was not much surplus room when nearly five hundred cattle were on the inside.92

The yoking procedure was one of great excitement; it usually occupied from a half to three quarters of an hour.93 Mr. Majors, however, states

86 Chandless, op. cit., 283-284.
87 Clarke, op. cit., 300; Chandless, op. cit., 83.
88 Marvin, op. cit., 227.
89 Rolfe, op. cit., 283; Bratt, op. cit., 54.
90 Barns, op. cit., 200.
91 Majors, op. cit., 102; Clarke, op. cit., 300.
92 Chandless, op. cit., 52.
93 Bratt, op. cit., 54.
YOKING UP

Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society
that his men could finish the entire job of yoking the teams, driving out of corral, hitching to wagons, and making the first "pop of the whip" in a record time of sixteen minutes by the watch. All credit for such rapidity he gave to thorough discipline. Unskilled men, he adds, "were often more than an hour doing the same work." 94

Fast work with ease at the yoking hour depended, of course, on the time the train had been on the road. If many of the steers, or even a small proportion of them, were only a few days in the yoke and still half wild, it is certain that considerable time was needed at the beginning of each drive to get under way. On such trains the work of yoking and hitching was serious business; men were dragged about the corral while holding on to the horns of an animal with one arm and clenching the nostrils of the same animal with the hand of the other arm; steers were kicking; chains were entangled; yokes were turned upside down; lariats were "thrown in vain"; yoke keys were lost; oxen were escaping from the corral through unchained gaps; mess-boxes were overturned and frying-pans, coffee-mills, skillets, cups, plates, and flour and bacon lay scattered over the ground; all seemed "in hopeless confusion, like revolutions on the continent." But Mr. Chandless, 95 the author of the last quoted words, concluded, "may the revolutions end as happily."

94 Majors, op. cit., 103-104.
95 Chandless, op. cit., 52-54; a couple of neat descriptions of ideal procedures of yoking oxen are included here; they are given in the order of the references: Marvin, op. cit., 227-228; Rolfe, op. cit., 283.

"The first step in the direction of yoking up was to take your lead yoke upon your shoulder and hunt up your off [right-hand] leader. Having found your steer you put the bow around his neck, and with the yoke fastened to him led him to your wagon, where he was fastened to the wheel by a chain. You then took the other bow and led your near [the left] leader with it to his place under the yoke. Your lead chain was then hooked to the yoke and laid over the back of the near leader, and the other cattle were hunted up and yoked in the same
The train was moving now and the "bull whackers" were in their glory. They generally walked on the left side of the teams unless the dust was too troublesome. It was very difficult, if not impossible, to manage the team from the driver's seat. For long hours the wagoner walked at the side of his team yelling "giddap" to the oxen, and punctuating his words with cracks of his long whip. The lash of the whip was first coiled and then whirled several times over and around the head when it was let shoot straight out and then brought back with a quick jerk of the stock. "When thrown into space, it would make a report nearly as loud as a revolver." The "bull whackers" were experts with their whips, and thirty or forty of these cracking at the same time sounded "like the fire of a picket line of soldiers." But a steer was seldom struck unless he was a deadhead. A well placed whip popper "would nip the hide out just like a knife." It was considered, however, "almost a crime for a bull whacker to cut a bull and draw the blood." It was the noise of the popper that manner until the wheelers were reached. Having the cattle all yoked, you drove them all out, chained together, and hitched them to the wagon.

"...at the command 'Yoke up!' every driver starts in among the cattle with yoke on his left shoulder, ox-bow in his right hand, and key in his mouth, looking for his off-wheeler. When found, the yoke is fastened to him with one end resting on the ground until the near one, his mate, is found. When yoked together they are taken to the wagon and hitched in their place; then come the others in their order, only a short time being required until ready for the order from the waggonmaster -- 'Pull out!'

96 Ware, op. cit., 140-141.
97 Majors, op. cit., 103.
98 Kearnes, Lincoln Journal, op. cit.
99 Young, op. cit., 25; Rolfe, op. cit., 283.
100 Rolfe, op. cit., 283.
101 Ware, op. cit., 140.
102 Hooker, op. cit., 38-40.
usually produced the desired effect on a laggard,\textsuperscript{103} for the snap of the lash "was a terror to the poor brutes" under the control of the driver.\textsuperscript{104}

The "bull whacker," nevertheless, fully lost his consideration in the use of his whip on the rattlesnakes. Their skill here netted good returns, for they cleared the roadway of these reptiles which occasionally would strike fatally the train's animals.\textsuperscript{105}

The ambition of every wagon-master was to get his train on the trail ahead of all others. Oftentimes the white covered wagons stretched out on the prairie as far as the eye could see.\textsuperscript{106} Two, three, or four or more trains were moving constantly along the route, "some going east, some going west."\textsuperscript{107}

On a clear still day the clouds of dust stirred up by the moving wagons could be seen "twenty miles away," and there was heard when the wind favored "the pop-popping of the bull whips for a good two miles."\textsuperscript{108}

There is a record of one freighter of 1866 that trains, when on a hard trail, could be heard while "three or four miles away."\textsuperscript{109}

Teams were trebled oftentimes to draw a wagon over a steep hill or through a soft bottomed river or stream. If a wagon was stalled, teams from other wagons were unhitched and brought to the rescue of the wagon in trouble. On the descent of the steep slopes it was necessary to lock both rear wheels and even then the heavy wagons literally would slide

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Cox, \textit{op. cit.}, 75.
\textsuperscript{105} Pelzer, \textit{op. cit.}, 142; Mr. Majors, \textit{op. cit.}, 105, states that the freighters on the Santa Fe route sometimes would send several men "ahead of the caravan with whips to frighten the snakes" out of the roadway.
\textsuperscript{106} Marvin, \textit{op. cit.}, 227.
\textsuperscript{107} Sydenham, \textit{op. cit.}, 166.
\textsuperscript{108} Bechdolt, \textit{op. cit.}, 210.
\textsuperscript{109} Bentley, \textit{op. cit.}, 49.
down the hillside until a level was reached. At the bottom of the hills "the most inconvenient place for such pranks," the oxen delighted to turn off to grass. 110

Mention has been made of the extra cattle with a train. These, it will be recalled, were for replacements in case of injury, lameness or illness of any of the animals in yoke. Lameness and injury to the oxen was caused generally by bad driving down the steep hills, and by failing to lock the wheels in such places. If the "extras" were not brought from the base the wagon-master might purchase them from settlers or ranchmen along the trail. Rules on the road prohibited the herding of the loose cattle ahead of the train. To avoid all unnecessary confusion they were made to follow the wagons and a man was detailed each day to care for the extras. It was a tiresome task and no "bull whacker" enjoyed it. Generally steers that had become very lame were left behind. Humane treatment was shown really by this act, for it ended any further suffering of the animals and they would not starve. 111

The freighters always enjoyed the days or hours of rest spent at one of the forts along the way. In 1863 Fort Kearny had about a thousand soldiers and the soldiers were as interested in the trains as were the "bull whackers" in the forts. They watched all the passing trains hoping to see someone they might know. 112 Fort Kearny was a haven to trainmen and the sight of Old Glory "waving from the flagstaff" gladdened every freighter's heart. This was true of all the forts along the route, and

110 Greeley, op. cit., 24; Chandless, op. cit., 122, 72, 55.
111 Chandless, op. cit., 34, 40, 82, 99, 124.
especially did the Stars and Stripes beckon to the trainmen a paternal welcome at old Fort Laramie some three hundred and fifty miles further west. There were the boys in blue, the fort, the "homes of civilized people," Indians and Indian traders, "squaws and papooses." 113

All the trainmen went armed, and when in hostile Indian territory the wagons traveled in double file for greater safety. This form of travel greatly impeded the progress of the train, for much better time was made driving single file. 114 Following are given two examples of trains and their personnel, the number of wagons, and their destination and equipment in arms. Mr. Meline 115 writing in 1866 quoted from a Kearney City paper dated June 6 of that year:

"Conductor Harmon Kish, 20 ox wagons, 30 men, 8 guns, 23 revolvers; bound for Denver.

"Conductor S. M. Scott, 32 wagons, 34 men, 34 revolvers, 20 guns; bound for Salt Lake."

All trains passing a government fort in 1865 were required to have a sufficient number of men which in the judgment of the post's commander were able to cope with the Indians. Generally one hundred men were considered necessary. The danger lay in the separation of trains once a fort was passed. It seems that the most desperate foes were the degraded half-breeds and the squaw men. The latter were mostly French and Spanish. 116

It became necessary for trains to be organized in military order during the most critical periods of Indian hostility. At every post the trains were halted and the men counted. Sixty wagons and one hundred men,

113 Sydenham, op. cit., 169, 170, 173.
114 Meline, op. cit., 22; Clarke, op. cit., 303.
115 Meline, op. cit., 22.
116 Young, op. cit., 43-44.
wrote Mr. Tyson, were required before a train might pass on. To make up the number, trains and outfits were united, and officers were appointed. A captain or conductor was given full command of the united trains and his orders were to be obeyed.

A copy of a military order is inserted here which is exemplary of the many that were issued in those trying years.

"Special Order No. 256 - In compliance with special order No. 41, C. S., headquarters department of the Missouri, the trains now at this post ready to start west are organized into a company for mutual protection and the safety of the train. Mr. W. W. Watson is hereby appointed conductor and will be held responsible for the holding of the organization and train together. In no case will he permit the train nor men under his charge to straggle along the road. He will camp as near military posts as possible, and will report any insubordination among the men belonging to the train to the commanding officer at the post nearest the place where such insubordination shall have arisen. By order.

E. B. Murphy,
Captain Seventh Iowa Cavalry, Commanding Post.
H. P. Leland,
Lieutenant and Post Adjutant."

In case of an approaching attack by the Indians, cool, quick and effective action was needed on the part of every man. The wagons were formed into corral; the cattle were driven within; every gap was securely chained; and the guns were loaded for immediate service.

There were times when the military posts sent an escort of soldiers with the united trains.

But occasions arose when an escort of soldiers served against the train instead of protecting it. They were not cases of Indian attacks, however. Mr. Ware relates the experience that a number of tough freighters had with the military authority of one post. They had caused

117 Tyson, op. cit., 258.
119 Clark, op. cit., 302-303.
120 Sydenham, op. cit., 171.
122 Ware, op. cit., 382-384.
considerable depredations at a ranch seventeen miles east of Julesburg while on a return trip from Denver to their eastern base. The ranch owner reported the affair to the Commander of the nearby fort who sent a corporal and eight men with orders to bring the wagon-master to the post. The wagon-master refused to come and several "roughneck bull whackers" offered some show of arms. The outcome was the bringing to the fort not only the wagon-boss but with him two or three teamsters. Upon refusal to settle for the damages done, which the ranchman calculated had amounted to $162.50, the men were sent to the guard-house where, they were told, they would remain until the amount was paid in cash.

The following morning the men promptly settled the account. But this did not end the matter. The Fort Commander sent a soldier escort with orders to accompany the train to a point ten miles east of the ranch. This, we might say, was an early case of friction between a freighting company and a granger; the date was 1864.

There was considerable life along the trail as well as life on the trail. The most conspicuous life was the exuberant prairie grass. Here and there blossomed the wild lupine. In the valleys grew some timber, the most common kinds of trees being the elm, maple, hickory, oak, and cottonwood, the latter especially close to water. On the hot days of July and August these little shady places tempted the passers-by, for shade, water and rest were most inviting.123

"They used to take the shortest cut
The cattle trails had made;
Get down the hill by the easy slope
To the water and the shade."124

124 Piper, op. cit., 55.
The plains-wolf was not an emaciated or famished fellow, "but rather a sleek, well-conditioned gentleman." He delighted to steal bacon from the "bull whackers'" mess box. He might attack man or animal if they were disabled. Coyotes the size of "shepherd dogs" roamed the prairies. Great herds of buffalo besides thousand of elk, antelope, and deer grazed on the extensive plains. There was no lack of prairie-dogs, pole cats quite able to protect themselves, burrowing owls, rattlesnakes, and grasshoppers. In 1855, Mr. Chandless tells us, the grasshoppers were a troublesome pest; "we saw...grasshoppers; smelt grasshoppers; breathed grasshoppers; and ate grasshoppers."

In the tall prairie grass lived the sage-hens. Prairie-chickens were in abundance, and meadow-larks, plovers, song-sparrows and curlews contributed their bit to break the monotony of the trail. Cowbirds in large flocks followed the trains.

"Have you an eye for the trails, the trails, The old mark and the new? What scurried here, what loitered there, In the dust and in the dew?"

Numerous extra jobs occupied the "bull whackers" when in camp or delayed along the trail. There were boxes to wedge, ox-bow keys to make and bows to fit to yokes, wheels to fix, oxen to shoe, tires to tighten, and wagons to grease. Because of the sand and dust the wheels had to be greased frequently.

The rough roads of some sections along the route, especially west of Fort Laramie, caused many breakdowns. But anywhere on the trail the mud holes, the hills, the river crossings, the heavy sands, the steep grades

125 Chandless, op. cit., 29.
126 Ibid., 80; Young, op. cit., 45-46, 47.
127 Chandless, op. cit., 80.
128 Ibid., 103; Kearnes, Lincoln Journal, op. cit.
129 Piper, op. cit., 55.
130 Bratt, op. cit., 52, 55.
131 Ware, op. cit., 140.
CROSSING A RIVER

Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society
were a constant problem for the trainmen and a problem in particular for the wagon-master. 132

Long spells of dry weather loosened the tires on the wheels, and these had to be reset while on the trail even though no special machinery was at hand for the purpose. The process of this work is described by Mr. Clarke. 133

"...the wagon felloe would be increased with one or two thicknesses of heavy cotton duck tacked on. Then this would be wet and the wagon tire placed on the ground surrounded by 'buffalo chips' and set on fire. When red-hot and fully expanded it would be lifted on to the wheel, and as soon as in place, water poured on so as not to burn the duck or felloe, and it would shrink into place. It was seldom that a tire had to be set a second time."

Because of the dry and sandy roads the oxen often became lame and foot-sore, and needed to be shod. Shoes, made in pairs for the cloven hoof, were part of each train's supplies. 134 As a general rule no ox-shoeing needed to be done except on the trail. A portable forge supplied the heat necessary for the job. A steer was as reluctant to come to the wagon wheel for his shoes as he had been reluctant to come for his brand. Fortunately for him, however, the shoeing cost him no suffering. With his hoof pressed firmly against the side of the wheel the shoes were nailed on in short order. One requirement that the wagon-master needed for his position was ability to perform the ox-shoeing job in case the teamsters could not do it. 135

"Have you an eye for the laden wheel, The worn tire or the new? Or the sign of the prairie pony's hoof Was never trimmed for shoe?" 136

132 Barns, op. cit., 199; Bratt, op. cit., 70.
133 Clarke, op. cit., 301.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Piper, op. cit., 55.
Some trains preferred wood rather than buffalo or cow chips for fuel. When wood became scarce on the upper Platte a train might halt for a day and send two or three wagons, from which the cargo had been unloaded, into the foot-hills for wood. Three wagon loads would supply fuel for another ten days.\textsuperscript{137}

Any delay along the way was welcomed by the men, for if no extra tasks were assigned the time was spent in getting out the wash, in mending clothes, looking for wild fruit in season, or taking a "delicious bathe" if there should be a pond, creek or river nearby. A bar of soap to a "bull whacker" was almost a priceless possession, for the camp supplies did not include always this item. Soldiers at the forts sometimes gave soap to the trainmen.\textsuperscript{138}

The "bull whacker's" life was a rough and hard life, but it was not a life of all hardship or a life of all gloom. There were bright days, many bright days. It was a life that had its sunshine. Each day brought something new, something different, and something interesting. Life on the trail had its toil, risk and suffering; life on the trail had its pleasure, defence and contentment.

O, was it the freighters last went by,  
And where will they ford the stream?  
Where will they halt in the early dusk,  
And where will their camp-fires gleam?\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137} Bruffey, op. cit., 26.  
\textsuperscript{138} Chandless, op. cit., 89-90, 27, 62.  
\textsuperscript{139} The original verse has been paraphrased here, but in this free translation acknowledgement is hereby given to Mr. Piper, op. cit., 55.
CHAPTER V

Dangers and Risks of the Trail

A stampede was dreaded more than almost any other misfortune that might take place on the trail. On such occasions it frequently happened that many animals were "irretrievably lost" causing the failure of a train to reach its destination.¹

Storms were the most common causes of the stampede, and storms also were the causes of extreme discomforts for the men. The cattle would become "crazed with fright" and the instant they could be loosed, with much difficulty, from their yokes and chains a mad mass of snorting, bellowing, stampeding animals raced aimlessly onto the broad prairie, the roar and noise of its departure becoming lost in the thunder and blasts of the storm. After several days of search the cattle might be overtaken many miles from camp perhaps "none the worse for their fearful experience."² Mr. Rolfe³ recalled an experience when one half of a stampeded herd was lost, and the few animals that were found after many days were "forty miles from the camp from which they started."

Every possible provision was made for the protection of the cattle. An approaching storm at night was sufficient reason for immediate corralling of the steers. When in Indian country pickets were placed to watch for the approach to the camp of any redskin, for even though he came on friendly mission his appearance might stampede the cattle.⁴

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¹ Marcy, op. cit., 41.
² Young, op. cit., 29-30, 33.
³ Rolfe, op. cit., 284.
⁴ Lyon, op. cit., 266.
MIDNIGHT STORM AND STAMPEDE

Courtesy of Everett N. Dick, Lincoln
Mr. Bratt\(^5\) has left a very interesting paragraph describing briefly a stampede while on the trail with the oxen in yoke and drawing their wagons.

"Some of our teams got scared at either a herd of buffalo, a pack of wolves or sneaking Indians while we were doubling teams, pulling over sand hills at the west end of the Mitchell bottom. Never before did I see six-yoke ox-teams stampede on a run with loaded wagons containing sixty to seventy hundred pounds of dead freight. Some fifteen teams did this for nearly half a mile, going faster than their drivers could run. I don't see how we escaped being run over. I was sitting in my wagon half dozing when my team started with others in front and in rear of it. Hanging on to the wagon bow saved me from being thrown out of the wagon, from which at the first chance I jumped, just clearing the wheels of my own wagon and causing the team of the next wagon to shy from me as I struck the ground and commenced to scramble to my feet to get out of the way. The noise made by this little stampede was not unlike the passing of a vigorous cyclone. The only damage done was the upsetting of one wagon and the crippling of a steer."

The men oftentimes came from the trail cold, wet, and hungry, only to be ordered at once on guard duty. Here the men showed the real spirit that possessed them. The warming, drying fire would be left bravely and immediately at the call to duty.\(^6\)

Heavy rains hastily sent many a "bull whacker" from his bed beneath the big wagons to greater safety from inundation on top a load of freight beneath the spreading canvas covers.\(^7\)

The plains at times were covered with water which caused the trains to move slowly, and which added no comfort to the teamsters who were obliged to travel ankle-deep in water beside their teams along the trail.\(^8\)

High water did not facilitate the fording of the rivers. One by one the wagons would be brought across until the entire train was safely

\(^{5}\) Bratt, op. cit., 67.
\(^{6}\) Chandless, op. cit., 22.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., 31-32.
\(^{8}\) Ibid., 36; Majors, op. cit., 143.
on the "goalward" side. But this task frequently required the time of two or three days and it often required the drivers to cross and to recross a creek or river many times. Mr. Bratt and three fellow wagoners crossed one river fourteen times in one day. They would take advantage, however, of the backs of the extra oxen on the return trips through the water to help bring over another wagon. 9

In 1862 a "fearful blizzard" caught a freight-train on the trail twenty miles east of Fort Kearny. It was "a terrific northwester with blinding snow." To build a fire was all but impossible and a warm meal was indeed out of the question. 10

In January of 1864 a mule train loaded with corn and flour for Denver encountered a terrific blizzard near the Platte River some four miles east of Fort Cottonwood. The wagons became separated and some of the animals were driven before the gale and were never overtaken or caught again. The train was almost a total wreck. What corn and flour could be salvaged was sold to the fort and the few saved or retrieved mules were hitched to what undamaged wagons remained and driven back to their eastern base. 11

At Three Crossings on the Sweetwater a heavy snow accompanied by wind and dust engulfed a train encamped there in 1855. The train crew had taken no warning of the approaching storm the evening before and discovered the following morning that their cooking and table utensils of skillets, pans, kettles, plates, cups and all was buried beneath the snow. A "pitiful fire" made from sage-brush from which the snow was shaken little served to warm the breakfast. 12

9 Bratt, op. cit., 66.
10 Lyon, op. cit., 266.
11 Ware, op. cit., 101.
12 Chandless, op. cit., 107.
A forty-eight hour snow storm held a freight-train at Plum Creek for two days late in 1856. The prairie was covered with snow and the stock having no food and being beaten and blinded by the storm became very restless and with much difficulty was held in the corral. Nevertheless, the crew of that train felt fortunate indeed when it later compared its experience with that of another crew at the same place seven years later. That year the men faced not a storm of snow and wind but it faced instead a storm of arrows and bullets from some two hundred Cheyenne red men. Not one member of that crew was left to tell the story.\(^\text{13}\)

A newspaper item of the year 1858 reveals what hardship and suffering came to a small group of teamsters returning to their eastern base in December of that year.

"Arrival from Fort Bridger of seventeen men in employ of Russell, Majors, & Waddell - Left Fort Bridger on November 1 met with great suffering on Plains. Cold and snow. Obliged to leave their wagons at Salt Creek about fifty miles west, swamped in the deep snow. Men nearly frozen. Food scarce. Flour selling at $25 & $30 a sack on route, Coffee 50 & 75¢ lb., other provisions very high."\(^\text{14}\)

When a wagon-train left its eastern base and headed its "pointers" westward there was one thing which was a certainty, "the certainty of trouble somewhere along the road." And during the years of the red man's hostility Indian fighting, if only a skirmish, was expected on every trip.\(^\text{15}\)

The Indian danger zone in Nebraska was mainly in the region west of Fort Kearny.\(^\text{16}\) But even in the danger zone things would be quiet for a

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13 Sydenham, op. cit., 171.
14 Nebraska City News, December 18, 1858.
15 Bechdolt, op. cit., 208, 209.
16 Barns, op. cit., 203.
time and then suddenly as if they arose out of the earth the Indians would appear and attempt or commit some depredation. Indian boys followed the trains and caused considerable annoyance.17

When Indians were reported near guns and ammunition were distributed, and the teams were ordered two abreast thus making a double file on the road. It was interesting to observe the attitude of the men before an Indian attack, remarks one writer; a few might be cowards; a few looked upon the ordeal as an adventure and expected to see some fun; but the third group, and the largest group, considered it all as stern reality and serious business for the protection of life and property.18

Within the improvised fort made by the big wagons brave men made many a brave fight. "Weather-stained teamsters lying on their bellies under the vehicles," used their rifles with slow but certain "precision against the wider circle of naked warriors whooping around them on their bare-backed ponies."19

With the protection of a well made corral fifty steady nerved men could outwit "five times their number."20

In 1866, states Mr. Bratt,21 freight trains were attacked daily on the trails, especially on the California Trail.

The greatest plundering was done by "prowling bands of Indians," and in spite of all the care and precaution taken some wagon trains were despoiled, the wagons destroyed by the torch, the cattle driven away, and the train crew killed.22

17 Ibid., 201.
18 Tyson, op. cit., 259; Chandless, op. cit., 57, 86.
19 Bechdolt, op. cit., 209.
20 Young, op. Cit., 61.
21 Bratt, op. cit., 53.
22 Cox, op. cit., 75, 76.
At Ackley's ranch nine miles above Julesburg a train of seventeen wagons was burned by the Indians in 1865. The wagons were loaded with groceries and the Indians had a merry time around their prize which they salvaged before firing the train. The train crew and ranchmen had put up a stiff fight before they finally escaped to a military post leaving the train to the redskins.23

Between the 17th and 20th of July, 1866, on Cedar Fork, a massacre occurred and in the list of the dead was the name of the wagon-master, a Mr. Dillon. This was the result of another Indian attack on an overland freight-train.24

The Indian War of 1864 caused the destruction of many a train and the loss of many a freighter's life. In the autumn of 1865 at a place called Elm Creek Ranch, opposite from where Lexington, Nebraska, is now located, one train arrived at a spot where eleven men had recently been buried, "their blood still staining the ground where they had fallen and their loads, principally of shelled corn, still burning. The sight of the demolished ranches and remnants of burnt wagons grew to be a common experience with us."25 The bodies of the eleven men had been buried by the crew of a freight train that had passed shortly after the tragedy. Those were the times "that tried men's souls," and, perhaps, there never were braver men than those who traveled the plains on the overland freights in those days of hardship and danger.26

A very common practice of the Indians on the war-path was to ambush their victims, when possible, and to steal their live stock.27

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23 Hadley, op. cit., 275.
24 Dillon, op. cit., 224.
26 Tyson, op. cit., 258-259.
27 Barns, op. cit., 203.
A most awful and horrifying Indian attack and massacre that took place in 1865 is described by Mr. Young in the following brief story:

"On they came in single file, their blood-curdling war whoop enough to weaken the bravest. Closer they came, bedecked in war-paint and feathers, their chief in the lead resembling the devil incarnate with all his aids bent on exterminating as brave a band of freighters as ever crossed the plains. Nearer they came, their ponies on a dead run, the left leg over the back, the right under and interlocking the left, firing from the opposite side of them, ducking their heads, encircling the camp and yelling like demons. Their racket, together with the yelping of their mongrel dogs and the snorting and bellowing of the cattle, made it an unspeakable hell. Every man stood to his gun, and from between the wagons, at the command of the wagon boss, poured forth with lightning rapidity his leaden messengers of death. For about an hour they made it very interesting for us. It was almost impossible to hit one as they kept circling the camp, drawing nearer with each circle made. How many were killed we did not know as they carried them off, but from the number of riderless ponies, a dozen or more must have been dispatched to their happy hunting grounds. During the fight a portion of them bore down on the poor pilgrims' camp, in plain sight, and massacred all, running off their cattle and such of their outfit as they wanted.

"Savages in their glory.

"Mothers with babes at their sides and with uplifted, clasped hands, implored the cruel warriors for mercy, but it was like pouring water on the desert sands. Crazed by thirst for blood and the scalps of the whites, they knew no mercy. The hatchet-like tomahawk glittering in the evening twilight, held with a vice-like grip in the hand of a cowardly savage, came down at last with such force as to crush through skull and brain, and all was over. We were powerless to render assistance. The scene was heartrending. The depredations of these savages is too revolting to relate, and after completing their hellish work, they sneaked back as they came, keeping up their sickening yell until distance drowned it entirely."

In a previous chapter a brief outline was given of the work of the wagon-master. Mention was made also of the danger that oftentimes accompanied the wagon-master in the performance of that work. One of the tasks required him to leave the protection afforded by his train and to go in search of suitable watering places for the animals. In times of Indian hostility extreme risk was taken when one separated himself for

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28 Young, op. cit., 61-65.
any great distance from the wagons; for the risk and danger was great enough when with the wagons.

One hot day during the time of the serious Indian troubles along the Platte Valley routes a wagon-master scouted the trail ahead in search of a watering place for the toiling, thirsty teams.

He had located water and was letting his horse drink, but he had not dismounted. His horse no more than had touched the water with his nose when it sensed the presence of Indians. It jumped in alarm, and the wagon-master suddenly found himself surrounded by a party of Indians who doubtless thought they had their victim trapped. It was quite impossible for the one man to fight his way out or to escape in any other manner than to break through the enclosing circle. This he did, and only the speed of his faithful horse saved him from the shower of arrows and bullets sent upon him by the redskins. They simply had not calculated the movement of the animal in taking their aim.

Now it became a race for life. All the Indians were left far behind except one who was riding a pony which was much faster than the horse of our wagon-master. On they came in a running duel toward the train.

The wagon-master emptied his 16-shot carbine repeater; he emptied his two six shooters; but the Indian fastening himself to the far side of his pony kept up an even race and kept shooting arrows from underneath his pony's neck. The wagon-master was now emptying his belt revolver, his last defence. Aiming one shot a little farther ahead than he had been doing he succeeded in climaxing the combat and a riderless Indian pony hastened back to the war-party. The wagon-master had received one painful wound, an arrow in the hip. It was the assigned duty of a fellow "bull whacker" to extract tenderly or otherwise the embedded shaft.29

29 Barns, op. cit., 203-205.
Perhaps out of fairness to the Indian he should not be criticized or censured unduly. He had been pushed farther and farther into the waste places, and farther and farther away from his original home and his natural habitat. Naturally he questioned whether the pushing ever would cease and whether the pushing meant his final extermination. He saw the hunting grounds which provided the living for himself and for his family being reduced slowly but surely. Should he submit? Should he object? Should he oppose? Should he refuse to be restricted further? Were the whites always right? Did the whites ever make a mistake? Had the whites always fulfilled their part of the agreements and treaties? Had the whites ever inflicted an act of cruelty on the redskins? It is not the purpose of this thesis to answer all or any of these questions. They are made here only for the purpose to suggest a bit of meditation before undue sentence is passed on the ignorant native tribes, the first Americans.

The freighters would "read with interest the inscriptions" on the graves along the route. Their interest decreased, no doubt, as the mounds of earth and crude markers became more common, but their interest increased, to be sure, when a mound of earth covered the remains of a member of their train.30

Trains went supplied with but few remedies for the sick; there might be in stock a few "boxes of quack pills." The big wagons jolting for hours over the rough roads added no comfort to a sick man lying on "a bed of coffee-sacks." The same clothing was worn day and night, and little use of water was made except for drinking. The food such as "bull whackers" could digest in health was hardly suitable for a "bull whacker" to digest.

30 Chandless, op. cit., 27.
in illness. The heat and the dust by day and the cold by night in the
wagons afflicted the sick and greatly hindered a speedy recovery. Sick-
ness and death, as elsewhere, was no respecter of persons on the trail.
Sometimes the strongest men would be taken by the grim reaper. 31

Cholera was the dreaded disease on the plains. Entire trains were
obliged often to corral their wagons for days at a time until the men re-
covered, or until additional help could be secured to put the train again
on its journey. 32

Fatal illness often took its toll. A pile of straw, and a few blan-
kets was the death bed "in an old freight wagon." "If the angels ever
hover over the dying, there never would have been a more appropriate place
for their ministrations." 33

Bodies buried on the trail were wrapped in a blanket, and perhaps a
few boards from boxes were used to line the grave which was dug suffi-
ciently deep - "too deep for the wolves." A wooden marker with a carved
or written inscription was the only identification for the final rest-
ing place of an overland freighter who died on the trail. 34

Cities, towns, highways, railroads, industries, farms, happy homes
and a prosperous west are the only monuments for hundreds of the men who
braved the hardships and the dangers of the trail and who gave their
lives that these things might follow after. 35

31 Ibid., 58, 59.
32 Majors, op. cit., 262.
33 Ibid., 263.
34 Chandlee, op. cit., 56-58, 61.
35 Majors, op. cit., 263.
CHAPTER VI

A Commercial Enterprise

The overland freighting business in the region of the Platte Valley existed for only a comparatively short period of time.¹ Yet it occupies an important place in the development of our country's transportation system on the great plains. No sooner had begun the overland migrations than a traffic to supply their needs was organized. Scattered groups over the face of the prairie and in the mountains were "crying for sustenance."²

Necessities and luxuries had to be hauled to the new markets from the banks of the Missouri River, and to supply this demand "a great system of wagon traffic was organized in the fifties"³ by the "freight carriers of the plains."⁴

A great impetus was given to this traffic because of an expedition of more than two thousand soldiers that were sent in 1857 and 1858 to the Mormon country to adjust some trouble there.⁵ Great quantities of food and supplies for the army and grain for the animals were transported by means of giant wagons in overland freight trains from the eastern bases on the Missouri River.⁶

The Colorado mining camps created an extensive business for the freighters, for men in those camps were too busy digging in the earth

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¹ Riegel, op. cit., 426
³ Ibid.
⁴ Paxson, History of Frontier, 462.
⁵ Peizer, op. cit., 140-141.
⁶ Majors, op. cit., 76.
or panning gold on some river bank to think of planting a garden or cultivating a field. Miners, soldiers, settlers, and mountaineers created the need for an overland freighting business. During this period it is estimated there was a floating population on the plains and in the mountains of one fourth of a million people. The majority of these received their supplies from the Missouri River.  

The stage coach and the overland mails may have seemed more picturesque, and they may have seemed more romantic; but they were not more important, and they were not more significant. "The mail and express served politics and intellect; the freighters provided the comforts and decencies of life...." The freighting business "was a great chain," and the big wagons furnished the physical links between the sections.  

It seems, however, that the border of the sixties had been accused of inciting an Indian war for the purpose of making money. Senator John M. Thayer from Nebraska endeavored to refute such charges before the United States Senate in the spring of 1867. In this speech the senator spoke of the magnitude of the overland commerce on the plains, and of its importance to the country. A part of the address is quoted here:

"I stand here to say to the senate, speaking in behalf of every class of the community on the border, speaking in behalf of every industrial pursuit, that nothing can be more abhorrent, nothing more dreaded by them than an Indian war. Why, sir, until these hostilities upon the frontier everything was prosperous there; the commerce on the plains had risen to an immense magnitude; we could talk about the commerce of the Plains, as well as you could talk of the commerce of the seas and the lakes.

7 Branch, op. cit., 519; Root and Connelley, op. cit., 314.
8 Riegel, op. cit., 420; Paxson, Last Frontier, 150,191.
9 Sydenham, op. cit., 174.
10 Senator John M. Thayer, "Nebraska in the United States Senate" in Forty Years of Nebraska at Home and in Congress. A special publication of the Nebraska State Historical Society, edited by W. J. Ashley (Lincoln, 1902), Second Series, IV, 270-271.
"These men went out upon the plains and did business in the mountains. You could go in no direction across these wide plains that you did not see long caravans of trains bearing merchandise from all the points of the Missouri to all the territories in the mountains and away to the northwest.

"It is the main source of our income; it is the market for our productive industry..."

The freighting business was conducted "both by individuals and by large companies." Many of the larger concerns were "heavily financed companies." There were many freighters who had only one wagon-train or perhaps only an outfit of a few wagons. There were small freighters in the business with but one wagon. In fact, the business was so predominant, and "so wide-spread and so important that a large proportion of the men who lived on the plains during the period devoted at least a portion of their lives to the occupation of bull 'whacker.'"

Many of the pioneer settlers and ranchmen on the border in the early 1860's engaged in freighting. "Every person, almost, in the neighborhood who could muster a vehicle went into the freighting business" and the equipment ranged from one to three trains of six or eight yoke teams "down to a one mule cart."

In the early years this business gave opportunity to the few farmers living on the Iowa and Nebraska side of the Missouri River to make a little extra money.

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11 Riegel, op. cit., 420.
12 Barnes, op. cit., 198.
13 Clarke, op. cit., 302.
14 Riegel, op. cit., 420.
16 A. F. Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska (Chicago, 1882), II, 1203.
17 Rolfe, op. cit., 291; H. M. Kemp, Letter written to Jay Amos Barrett, Lincoln, under date of September 19, 1899, MS Nebraska State Historical Society; Moses Stocking, "Autobiography" in Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society (Lincoln, 1885), I, 134. A few sentences taken from Mr. Stocking's own story are quoted.
In 1866 two brothers of southeast Nebraska harvested fifteen acres of corn and freighted it to Fort Kearny where they received for it a dollar and a half a bushel. The business netted them six hundred dollars. This it had done for two years.

In 1863 a man hired out his services until he saved enough money to buy a one wagon outfit and then went into the freighting business. Then there were families where there were more sons than the work on the claim gave jobs to. Income was limited to provide sufficiently for these large families and perhaps one of the sons would go on the trail as "bull whacker." If he did well, it would not be long before he possessed an outfit of his own. Two men would go into partnership, each furnishing two, three or four yoke of oxen; the wagon was furnished by the partner who had the lesser number of yoke, or the cost of the wagon might be divided equally.

One freighter in the 1850's made one hundred forty dollars a month by furnishing fresh buffalo meat to the government troops. All in all many of the freighters made money and "laid the foundation for considerable wealth" by freighting.

\[\text{Source: Meline, op. cit., 7.}\]
\[\text{Source: Hadley, op. cit., 274. Freighters with but one wagon or with but a small number of wagons would accompany a regular train, or several small outfits might unite to form a train. This practice was followed especially in the years of Indian hostility.}\]
\[\text{Source: Hayes, "Letter," op. cit.}\]
\[\text{Source: Bruffey, op. cit., 25.}\]
\[\text{Source: Chandless, op. cit., 65-66.}\]
\[\text{Source: Augustus E. Harvey, Sketches of the Early Days of Nebraska City, Nebraska Territory 1854-1880, Nebraska State Historical Society No. 978.276 (St. Louis, 1871), 22.}\]
Government freight contracts were given to the lowest bidder. The freighter receiving the contract had "to do all the hauling for certain named forts for a stated length of time, at a stated price per pound of freight."\(^{24}\)

There were instances when bidding freighters made special trips to Washington to present their application for the government freight contracts.\(^{25}\)

In order to move the immense quantities of supplies for the government, the contracting freighters needed thousands of animals and wagons and hundreds of men. On March 13, 1858, Mr. Majors, one of the successful bidders estimated his company would need, for the Nebraska City base, eight hundred to a thousand wagons, six to eight thousand yoke of oxen, and about twelve hundred men.\(^{26}\) But two weeks later a Nebraska City paper carried an advertisement for Mr. Majors’ firm. Besides showing an increase over the estimate as made by Mr. Majors for the number of cattle and men needed, the advertisement has a few unique features.

"ARMY OF THE WEST!"

"16,000 YOKE OF GOOD WORKING CATTLE,

"from four to 7 years of age, wanted at NEBRASKA CITY, for hauling freight from this point to Utah, for which SEVENTY-FIVE DOLLARS per Yoke will be paid. Notice will be given through the newspapers of the time they are to be delivered, but suppose they will be wanted about the first of May.

"FIFTEEN HUNDRED MEN

"wanted for teamsters who will be found and paid Twenty-five dollars per month out and back.

\(^{24}\) Sydenham, op. cit., 165.
\(^{25}\) Nebraska News, February 13, 1858. From a letter written at Washington, D. C. by Jas. D. White and sent to the Editor, M. W. Reynolds, of the Nebraska News under date of January 22, 1858.
\(^{26}\) Nebraska News, March 13, 1858.
"None but men of good habits need apply; as drinking intoxicating liquors, card playing; and profane language will not be permitted while in employment. Each man will be presented with a Bible and hymn book. Forty Wagon Masters wanted who must come well recommended and who will be paid the usual wages.

"A number of houses will be rented in Nebraska City, and one large store room. Apply to

RUSSELL, MAJORS & WADDELL."27

According to the above item the company proposed to pay seventy-five dollars for a yoke of oxen. The stock was to be delivered at Nebraska City. It was thought most probable, however, that this company would ask from sixty to one hundred twenty days time on the purchase of the stock.28 Two years later the same company was "desirous of buying several thousand head of oxen," and of employing hundreds of men for the entire season.29

Agents for the big freighting firms were sent oftentimes to neighboring cities and towns to hire men as teamsters and wagon-train helpers.30

But it was not only the big concerns that advertised for train stock.

"WANTED.-- From the 8th to the 12th of April, the subscriber will be at the Planters' House, in Nebraska City, ready to purchase for cash:

30 pairs No. 1 work oxen,
1 " " " mules,
1 saddle mule or poney, sound and hardy,
2 pairs milch cows, well broke, and suitable for a trip to Denver City.

(Signed) R. P. CLARK."31

The mules were wanted, perhaps, for the mess wagon, the pony for herding and the cows for supplying milk for the "bull whackers" coffee as well as doing their share in the yoke; the latter were to be "well broke."

27 Nebraska News, March 20, 1858.
28 Ibid., Marcy 15, 1858.
29 Nebraska City News, May 5, 1860.
30 Sydenham, op. cit., 165.
31 Peoples Press, March 27, 1860.
Freighters would buy from one another to secure an outfit, or some of the big companies desiring to reduce their equipment would offer same for sale through the newspaper columns.

"200 FREIGHT WAGONS FOR SALE"

"For sale low, at the Out-fitting Depot of Russell, Majors & Waddell, about Two Hundred FREIGHT WAGONS, large and small sizes. Enquire on the premises of A. W. STREET."33

It was not an unknown procedure to buy and sell freighting equipment at auction.

"ATTENTION FREIGHTERS -- A SPLENDID OPPORTUNITY TO BUY AN OUTFIT FOR THE PLAINS AT AUCTION!"

"To Freighters.-- For sale, the following outfit for the plains: Several yoke of well-broke work cattle, wagons, covers, bows, and yokes and chains, and a new light spring ambulance. Sale at 10 a.m. Saturday 15th, by Morrison & Fox, Auctioneers. Sale without reserve. Terms cash."34

In 1859 the cost price of new wagons at the factory was $150 - $175 each.35 In 1864, a fifteen unit train all complete with cattle, wagons, yokes and chains sold for $15,000.36 This train, therefore, cost $1,000 for each unit. If the wagon, yokes and chains cost $200 per unit, the cattle had a price of $66.66 a head, providing it was a six yoke team for each wagon.

The purchase of thousands of head of stock was a boon to the few farmers of the country who might have surplus animals to dispose of. It was estimated in March of 1858 that the firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell would spend half a million dollars for oxen alone.37 They must have spent more than this amount, for 16,000 yoke at $75 each would mean an expenditure of over a million dollars.

32 Nebraska City News, June 16, 1860.
33 Ibid., July 19, 1862.
34 Daily Nebraska City News, April 14, 1865.
35 Majors, op. cit., 144.
36 Andrew Jenson, "Latter-day Saints Emigration from Wyoming, Nebraska 1864-1866" in Nebraska History Magazine, XVII, No. 2.
37 Nebraska News, March 18, 1859; Nebraska City News, August 21, 1858.
Besides the purchase of stock the freighting companies bought great quantities of corn.

"20,000 Bushels of Corn Wanted.

"We will pay the highest market price in cash or merchandise, for all prime CORN, shelled or in the ear, delivered at our warehouses in Nebraska City, Wyoming and Otoe City.

HAWKE & NUCKOLLS." 38

"We wish to buy 50,000 bushels of corn delivered, in this city Brownville or at Peru for which we will pay the highest market price in cash.

D. J. Martin & Co." 39

In order to profit by producing the crop as well as by being freighters for other producers one firm in 1858 broke 600 acres of the prairie for corn planting. 40 The big freighting companies also opened stores where they carried large assortments of dry goods, clothing, groceries, hardware, boots and shoes. They sold for cash or in exchange for "corn fed hogs" or "for good sound corn." 41 Thus the freighters had a hand in many business enterprises.

Ranchmen along the trails made good money by trading sound oxen for sore footed oxen. It was generally an even trade of two for one. Many of the trains having a number of "invalids" would give gladly two of these for a sound healthy steer. Or they would pay a good price for a well one in an emergency. The rancher kept the footsore animals until their hoofs grew out; they would nail on some shoes and then be ready to trade each one for two more or to sell at "fancy prices." Around and around it went until a ranchman soon built up a large business of his own. 42

38 Peoples Press, March 27, 1860.
39 Nebraska Advertiser, February 24, 1859.
40 Nebraska City News, May 22, 1858.
41 Ibid., October 23, 1858.
42 Ware, op. cit., 71-72.
The wages or salaries paid to the trainmen varied with the experience of the men, with the year, and with the company or the freighter who was the employer. Mr. Chandless hired out as teamster in 1855 for twenty-five dollars a month. In 1859 wagon-masters generally received seventy-five dollars a month and drivers twenty-five dollars a month. This was besides their expenses while on the trail. Russell, Majors and Waddell paid their men an average salary of one dollar a day and expenses. This rate was for a round trip, sick or well, unless for neglect of duty or for misconduct a man was dismissed from his employment.

By 1865 the wages had increased greatly. The following is quoted from Mr. Rolfe:

"At the opening of the freighting season of 1865 the monthly wages paid drivers were $70 to $75. The wagon-master received $150 and his assistant $85 per month. At that time the price of labor and commodities was based, to a certain extent, upon the premium on gold coin. The gold quotations for the month of May of the above year were as follows: May 3, 1.41; May 15, 1.30; May 23, 1.32; May 24, 1.35; May 26, 1.36."

In the same year night herders received from $60 to $70 and board. "Mule skinners" were paid a little higher wage than were the

43 Chandless, op. cit., 6-7.
44 Nebraska City News, May 14, 1859.
45 Majors, op. cit., 105.
46 Cox, op. cit., 76.
48 Maddox, op. cit., 296. An interesting story is told by Mr. Young, op. cit., 21-23, of the way he and two companions secured jobs on a bull-outfit, and of the salaries which each one received: "After making application to several of the freighters and receiving the same reply as from the wagon bosses, we went a short distance down the river to the last of the warehouses. On our approach we discovered a genuine bullwhacker - as all ox drivers were called in that day - in conversation with a short, stout-built fellow with red hair and whiskers to match. The moment he became disengaged I inquired if he was a freighter. He said that he was and that he wanted more men. His name was Whitehead, just the opposite to the color of his hair, and as I stepped up to him I wondered what
"bull whackers." There was a difference of about $10 per month in 1865.\textsuperscript{49}

In 1866 wages seem to have fallen again, for a driver was paid $45 a month and board. This was for one way only. The rate was some ten dollars less if for a round trip, for premium was paid if the teamsters were discharged at the west end of the road. Oftentimes many of the cattle were sold there and wagons and teams would double up on the return journey. The majority of the wagons returned empty.\textsuperscript{50} The question of east-bound freight will be presented later.

Many of the men "spent their money as freely as the air that they breathed."\textsuperscript{51} Mr. Marvin\textsuperscript{52} adds that it was not unusual for the men

kind of a disposition the combination made - whitehead, redhead. I at once made application for a position for the three of us. In rather a disagreeable voice, he asked me if I could drive. I replied that I could.

"Can you handle a gun and revolver?"
"Certainly."
"How many trips have you made?"
"None."
"Then how the ----- do you know you can drive?"
"For the simple reason I am more than anxious to learn, and so are my friends." Then I made a clean breast of the position we were in and urged him to give us a chance.
"'Well,' he said, 'you seem to be a determined little cuss; are the rest of the same timber?'
"'I told him they were of the same wood but not of the same tree.

"After thinking the matter over, he said, 'I'll tell you what I will do. I will hire the big fellow for driver at one hundred and twenty-five dollars per month, and the little fellow for night herder at one hundred dollars a month, and yourself for cook for one mess of twenty-five men and for driver in case of sickness or death, at one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month.'

'We then gave him our names, and, in return, he gave us a note to Mr. Perry, his wagon boss. We at once started for his corral, two miles distant, where we found the gentleman. He asked where our traps were. We told him, and also assured him that we would report for duty the following morning...

"The following morning we had an early breakfast, broke camp, and reported at the corral where each was presented with two revolvers and a repeating carbine. I was then taken over to the mess wagon..."

\textsuperscript{49} Marvin, op. cit., 228-229.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.; Bratt, op. cit., 50; Kemp, "Letter," op. cit.
\textsuperscript{51} Marvin, op. cit., 229.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
from a big train, on their arrival in Denver, to "buy a large portion
of the town for the time being and turn themselves loose." Money flow-
ed freely in dance halls and gambling houses where men would stake every-
ting on "the turn of a card or the fall of a die."

But many of the men on the other hand "saved a handsome sum of mon-
ey." 53

Rations, like the wages, varied according to different periods of
time. In 1855, for example, each man received for each day "1\(\frac{3}{4}\) lb. of
flour, the same of bacon, coffee and sugar in sufficiency..." 54 In
1865 the rations, although based on government rations, were somewhat
more liberal. A comparison of the government and the plain's rations
were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1(\frac{3}{4}) lb. flour</td>
<td>2 lbs. flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\frac{3}{4}) to 1 lb. bacon</td>
<td>1(\frac{1}{2}) lb. bacon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 oz. coffee</td>
<td>1(\frac{1}{4}) oz. coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(\frac{1}{2}) oz. sugar</td>
<td>2 oz. sugar. 55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Rolfe 56 has also recorded a list of the provisions that were
necessary to send a twenty-six wagon train to Denver. Provisions were
carried for twenty-eight men for sixty days. From the total cost of
these supplies it can be seen readily that the average expense for
each man was about 46¢ per day. Not all of the supplies were food, but
the cost of running the train for sixty days was the above average per
day for each man with the train. This list is a record of the supplies
furnished a train in June 1865:

53 Cox, op. cit., 76.
54 Chandlee, op. cit., 21.
55 Rolfe, op. cit., 287.
56 Ibid.
"Rations for 28 Men for 60 Days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>@</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 sacks flour, 98 lbs. each......................</td>
<td>350.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500 lbs. bacon, 20 sa..........................</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>450.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sa. 50% coffee, 125 lbs.......................</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sa. $1 sugar, 250 lbs.........................</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>46.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sa. 75% beans, 2 bu.........................</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sa. dried apples, 103 lbs.....................</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 lbs. soda......................................</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 boxes matches..................................</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb. candles.....................................</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 boxes ground pepper............................</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 qt. cans wagon grease.........................</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb. ground mustard............................</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 lbs. ox nails...................................</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ox shoeing hammer................................</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ox shoeing rasp................................</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ox shoeing pincers............................</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sack 50% salt, 100 lbs........................</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 lbs. soap.....................................</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet and Lariat rope, 31% lbs..................</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 10-gal. water kegs............................</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 keg $1.50 vinegar, 5 gal......................</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$768.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The points of destination for the overland freight were many. There were the interior forts or western army posts; the mining camps in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Montana; the stage and mail stations; Indian agencies and traders' posts; and the distant cities and towns of Denver, Salt Lake, Virginia City of Montana, Black Hawk and Central City of Colorado, and the nearer towns of Dobytown, Plumcreek, Cottonwood Springs and Julesburg. 57

Local freighters hauled provisions to convenient points along the trail and there disposed of them to emigrants, or to freighters who may

not have taken sufficient supplies from their eastern base.\textsuperscript{58}

Practically all freight was carried by the pound.\textsuperscript{59} The rates varied greatly, and depended on the season of the year, on the class of freight and the distance hauled, on the competition, and on the attitude of the Indians; there were "enormous charges in some cases."\textsuperscript{60} The most customary rate was one dollar for each one hundred pounds for each one hundred miles, but the rate ranged from 75\(\text{¢}\) to $2.25 per 100 lbs. for each 100 miles. Winter rates to Denver were as high as twelve cents a pound.\textsuperscript{61} In 1862 freight was carried to Denver for as low as four and five cents per pound. But during the Indian war of 1863 and 1864 the rate increased to ten cents per pound for shipments to Camp Collins and Denver; while freight to Forts Halleck and Sanders the same years was delivered at fourteen cents per pound.\textsuperscript{62}

In the late fifties and early sixties the following rates per pound were charged for freight from Atchison to Denver:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
"Flour" & .09 & Whisky & .18 \\
Sugar & .13\textsuperscript{\textdagger} & Glass & .15\textsuperscript{\textdagger} \\
Bacon & .15 & Tobacco & .12\textsuperscript{\textdagger} \\
Dry-goods & .15 & Trunks & .25 \\
Crackers & .17 & Furniture & .31\textsuperscript{\textsection63}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

In 1858 and 1859 freight to Fort Laramie from the Missouri River was carried at "about $6.36 per 100 pounds," or $1.06 per hundred pounds for each 100 miles. In 1863 and 1864 the rate was ten cents per pound. In 1865 and 1866 it was eleven cents.\textsuperscript{64} The rates to Fort Laramie varied according to the season of the year, however. In the spring and summer

\begin{flushright}
58 Bruffey, op. cit., 27.
59 Bowles, New West, 32.
60 Young, op. cit., 20-21.
61 Rolfe, op. cit., 286; Munn, op. cit., 314.
62 Fulton, op. cit., 282-283.
63 Root and Connelley, op. cit., 303.
64 Fulton, op. cit., 281,283.
\end{flushright}
months when grass and water were plentiful the government rate was sixteen to twenty cents less per hundred pounds than it was during the winter months.\textsuperscript{65}

The rates to mountain points beyond Fort Laramie were higher, of course, but most of the supplies to those posts were transported by government trains from Fort Laramie.\textsuperscript{66}

Writers differ as to the rate charged on supplies hauled to Salt Lake or to the army in the Utah expedition. One writer states it was nineteen and three-fourths cents per pound,\textsuperscript{67} another gives it as being about twenty cents per pound,\textsuperscript{68} another twenty-two cents,\textsuperscript{69} another twenty-five cents,\textsuperscript{70} while still another states that the rate was as high as twenty-seven cents per pound.\textsuperscript{71} Mr. Rolfe\textsuperscript{72} does add, however, that the established freight rate to Salt Lake was twenty-five cents per pound, and, furthermore, that the rates to Denver and Salt Lake set the standard for rates to all other points.

Overland freighters made good use of the telegraph line in their business. "With the aid of the wire, they could, after reaching Fort Kearney, at intervals of about fifty miles along the Platte, keep posted on prices of grain, provisions, produce, etc., at Chicago and St. Louis as well as at the leading outfitting points on the Missouri River."\textsuperscript{73}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} House Executive Document, 36th Congress, 2nd Session, VIII, No. 47 (Ser. No. 1099), 9-11.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Fulton, op. cit., 261.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Rolfe, op. cit., 286.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Utah 1540-1886 (San Francisco, 1889), p. 498.
\item \textsuperscript{70} William Campbell, "Letter" to Addison E. Sheldon, February 16, 1924, in Nebraska History Magazine, VI, No. 4 (1923), 114-115.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Root and Connelley, op. cit., 135.
\end{itemize}
Considerable competition existed between the freighters. This com-
petition existed not only between freighters of the same town, but be-
tween freighters of different towns.

In 1860 the freighting firm of Messrs. A. & P. Byram guarantied to
deliver goods at Denver from the Missouri River one week sooner than
any other "and just as cheap," and furthermore, announcement was made
that this firm had "advantages possessed by no other company in the West." 74

Three weeks after the appearance of the above announcement another
appeared in a local paper of the same eastern base which advertised the
superior advantages of the firm of Mr. Majors. It read in part: "He
will take freight cheaper than any other person or persons can or dare
take it from any other point on the Missouri River, and will deliver it
at the mines six days earlier than can be done by any other firm." 75

In an Omaha paper of the same year and about the same date as the
references of the two announcements above there appeared an item con-
cerning R. Wood & Company of that city. This company was prepared, the
paper announced, to transport goods to the mines at rates as cheap or
cheaper than any other company on the Missouri River. 76

Henry Z Chapman of Omaha, in 1860, advertised he would transport
goods to Denver and the mines "with safety and dispatch." 77

From the records left of the classes and kinds of freight that was
transported across the plains in this period it seems that nearly every
kind and class helped to make up the many shipments.

74 Peoples Press, April 13, 1860.
75 Nebraska City News, May 5, 1860.
76 Omaha Nebraskan, March 31, 1860.
77 Ibid., June 30, 1860.
Of the machinery hauled there were, "Pitts" grain separators, "Buckeyes" harvesters and mowers, steam saw mills, steam engines, steam boilers, quartz mills, quartz crushing machines, and farm implements. And Mr. Bowles, on visiting an eastern base in 1865, wrote of the "agricultural implements for new farms beyond, waiting their turn in the great summer's commerce..."

The dry goods comprised clothing of all kinds, shoes, boots, and hats.

There were immense quantities of corn, oats, and barley; and traders' supplies and Indians' annuity goods helped to increase the volume of shipments. The following two accounts are taken from an old Day-book of Fort Kearny. These serve as examples only to show the great amount of grain that was freighted overland in the Platte Valley. There were doubtless scores of trains of this character.

"Asst. Qr. Mr. Office,
Fort Kearny, N. T.
Aug. 27, 58.

Train No. 28, Utah, No. 60 - 25 Wagons which left Nebraska City Augt. 9, 58 passed this post today in good order & condition, Containing as viz -- 1384 Sacks 135625 lbs. of Barley."

78 Omaha Nebraskan, February 25, 1860; Ibid., April 28, 1860; Nebraska City News, March 10, 1860; Ibid., June 28, 1860; Munn, op. cit., 314.
79 Bowles, New West, 31.
80 Nebraska City News, April 14, 1860; Munn, op. cit., 314; Barns, op. cit., 198; Campbell, op. cit., 114-115.
81 Rolfe, op. cit., 291; Paxson, History of Frontier, 462; Bratt, op. cit., 67-68.
82 DAY-BOOK of Fort Kearny Nebraska Territory. A journal of business transacted at the Fort between the dates of November 8, 1858 and December 2, 1862 with the exception of the period September 23, 1861 to January 18, 1862. A typewritten copy is owned by the Nebraska State Historical Society. The copy has been very recently received from the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution in Nebraska, Betsey Hager Chapter, Grand Island.
"Asst. Qr. Mr's. Office
Fort Kearny, N. T.
Sept 13, 1858

Train No. 30, Utah No. 21 - 25 Wagons which passed this post today in good order & condition & left Nebraska City Augt. 18, 1858 Contained the following Articles, 1509 Sacks Oats."

Hardware of almost every description including guns, ammunition and powder were part of this commerce, as were also tents, tarpaulins, drugs and liquor. Not all freighters, however, were allowed to transport liquor. 83

Let us again refer to the Day-book: 84

"Asst. Qr. Mr. Office
Fort Kearny,
Aug 31, 58.

Train No. 78, Utah, No. 60 - 25 Wagons which passed this post today in good order & condition containing the following Articles 1107 sacks Barley, 60 Boxes clothing Equipage, 22 Bales Clothing equipage, 12 Bales Store Tents, 12 sets Store Tent Poles, 40 Sets Hosp. Stores."

"Fort Kearny, N. T.
August 6th, 1858

Train No. 25, Utah No. 16 - 26 Wagons which left Nebraska City N. T. July 14th, 1858 passed this post today in good order & condition & contained 468 Kegs Horse Shoes, 363 Kegs Mule shoes & 60 Kegs Bone of Mule Shoe Nails."

Concerning the transportation of powder a news column of the day carried this interesting item:

"ANOTHER TRAIN.-- D. C. Corbin, Esq., of this city, left on yesterday with a train of nine wagons, loaded with eight tons of powder, provisions, &c. We should not be surprised if he gave the mines a regular blowing up. Success to Daniell" 85

Live stock which included cattle, poultry, and even dogs and cats, was not uncommon freight. The cattle, however, were driven rather than carried, as were also turkeys in some cases. 86

83 Barns, op. cit., 198; Munn, op. cit., 314; "Historical Notes" in Nebraska History Magazine (1854), XV, No. 2, 121; Omaha Nebraskan, September 1, 1850.
84 Day-book of Fort Kearny, N. T., op. cit.
85 Nebraska City News, June 16, 1860.
Then there were house furnishings, store fixtures and lumber. Three illustrations are given here:

"Mr. Dunn's train arrived Saturday, bringing a large supply of provisions, goods and house furnishing materials. Many other trains on the road with abundant supplies of all kinds. Rocky Mountain News."87

"Another instance of a long haul: We delivered in 1864 at Virginia City, Montana, a distance by wagon road in those days of 1,400 miles, a complete stock of drugs and store fixtures with a quantity of liquor, for which we were paid $0.28 per pound in gold dust."88

"Asst. Qr. Mr. Office
Fort Kearny, Sept. 16th,58

Train No. 82 Fort Kearny, No. 4 - 25 Wagons which left Fort Leavenworth, August 11th, 1858 arrived here today in good order & condition Containing as follows 700 Sacks Corn 728 Flooring Boards 214-1 1/4 inch boards, 24 doors, 258 Bundles Shingles."89

Groceries and meats comprised a large portion of the wagon-train freight. There were especially such items as flour, sugar, coffee, tea, canned goods, condensed goods, salt, vegetables, dried and fresh fruit, butter, eggs, lard, bacon, dressed hogs, sausages, fish and oysters.90

"Train, loaded with flour, left Plattsmouth Tuesday - understand Mr. Shaffer also started large train, loaded with flour. Plattsmouth Sentinel."91

"Asst. Qr. Mr. Office
Fort Kearny, N. T.
August 21, 1858

Train No. 76, Utah No. 58 - 25 Wagons which left Fort Leavenworth July 12th, 1858 passed this post today in good order & condition. Contents: 216 Bales Bacon, 7 Tierces Hams, 364 Sacks Flour, 410 Bls H Bread, 64 Sacks Beans, 15 Sacks Rice, 22 Sacks Coffee, 5 Sacks Java Coffee, 5 Box Tea, 89 Boxes Candles, 39 Boxes Soap, 18 Sacks Salt, 2 Bbls Molasses, 17 Bbls dried apples, 5 hlf Bls Whiskey, 1 Keg Whiskey, 36 Boxes vegetables."92

87 Nebraska City News, May 28, 1859. (Taken from the Rocky Mountain News, Denver.)
88 Munn, op. cit., 314.
89 Day-book of Fort Kearny, N. T. op. cit.
91 Omaha Nebraskan, August 18, 1860 (Taken from the Plattsmouth Sentinel).
"Fort Kearny, N. T.  
August 11, 1858  
Train No. 56, Utah No. 43 - 25 Wagons which left Fort Leavenworth,  
K. T. June 18th, 1856 passed this post with only (21) twenty one  
Wagons in good order & condition & contained 1226 Sacks Flour."

"Fort Kearny, N. T.  
August 12, 1858  
The four Wagons that were deficient in the above train passed  
this post today in good order & condition."93

The overland freight-trains of those days were much the same as are  
the railroad freight-trains of today so far as the variety of merchan-  
dise which they carried is concerned. And so far as there being a mar-  
ket for goods it appears that everything was wanted.94  

One freighter's load, in May of 1866, "consisted of butter, sugar,  
coffee, tea, eggs, cabbage, cookies, tomato catsup and pickles," which  

93 Ibid.  
94 Nebraska City News, April 14, 1860. In this issue an article writ-  
ten by a Denver correspondent of the St. Louis Democrat illustrates  
the market that existed in the mountains for merchandise of all des-  
criptions. Part of it read as follows: "Fine, rich, and latest styles  
of fashionable clothing for ladies and gentlemen, will find a profit-  
able market here as soon as brought on this summer, - fancy goods of  
all kinds, as well as the heavier and staple goods will be in great  
demand. Agricultural implements of all kinds, mechanical implements  
of every possible kind and calling will be wanted here. Pick-axe  
handles scarce here now at $1.25 each -- brooms ditto at $1 each.  
Seed potatoes, seed wheat, seed oats, barley, beans, garden fruits  
and flowers and vegetables of all kinds, will be very profitable  
articles to export here this year. Miners' boots, rubber boots, and  
very fine fashionable boots and gaiters, leather of all kinds, shoe  
legs, shoe nails, awls, wax, thread, woolen goods, shirts and stock-  
ings, clothing, common and extravagant, light and heavy, mining im-  
plements, quartz mills, paints, paint brushes, rope for hoisting and  
all kinds of ropes, quick silver, picks, stone-hammers, blasting  
fuse, drills, crowbars, nails of all and every kind, glass of all  
sizes, mirrors, cast steel, white lead, linseed oil, putty, wagon  
and buggy fixings for manufactory or repairing, cans of desiccated  
potatoes, for making soup in the far off mines, whips of all sizes  
and styles, saddles and bridles, hardware and china ware, locks and  
door knobs, bolts and screws, hinges and butts, groceries, staple  
and fancy, butter, cheese, lard, syrup, molasses, sugar, flour, plen-  
ty of ham and bacon, coffee, confectioneries of all kinds and styles,  
cream of tartar, baking powders, fire engines, and fire hose, and  
an inexhaustible assortment of American flags, will pay extremely  
well here, as soon as arrived. Saw mills and shingle machines will  
be sure to pay extremely well here, anywhere and all the time; also
were articles that had a ready sale. On a second trip in July of the same year the same freighter's load "consisted of tinware, groceries, and a good lot of eggs." The train on which Mr. Bratt drove in 1866 carried flour, sugar, salt, bacon, crackers, condensed milk, coffee, beans, syrup, desiccated vegetables, boots and shoes. The contents of a wagon in a train for a fort in 1850 comprised groceries, ammunition, medicines, and books "for the general good, to pass away...the long winter nights..." Mr. Chandless states that his train in 1855 hauled "...tea, coffee, rice, sugar, tobacco, soap, candles, mustard, spices, &c., of all kinds, and also casks of whiskey, some of which I fear were tapped before they reached Utah; boxes of hats, shoes, and ready-made clothes generally; dressed leather, bags of nails and shot, sheet iron, bar iron, block tin, and stoves of all shapes and sizes."

Here again will be included a couple of records from the Fort Kearny Day-book:

"Asst. Qr. Mr's Office
Fort Kearny,
Sept 13-58

Train No. 83, Fort Laramie No. 13 - 25 Wagons which left Fort Leavenworth, K. T. August 12-1858, passed this post today in good order & condition & contained the following Articles 974 sacks of corn, 65 Box Clothing, 5 Bales Clothing, 2 Tierce of Clothing etc., 2 Boxes Stationery, 2 Boxes of Wagon Boxes, 1 Bundle of wrenches, 1 box Spokes, 3 Iron Axels, 40 Pelloes, 30 Hind Hounds, 40 Front Hounds, 15 pieces Bolster Timber, 10 Paulins, 8 sacks of Corn."

several more brick yards. Handsome bar fixtures, pictures and ornaments would sell here fast; also a lot of window blinds of all kinds; and a stock of carpets and wall papers."

95 Lyon, op. cit., 269-270.
96 Ibid., 271.
97 Bratt, op. cit., 53.
98 Sydenham, op. cit., 167.
99 Chandless, op. cit., 12.
100 Day-book of Fort Kearny, N. T. op. cit.
"Train No. 19 - Utah 10
25 Wagons
Nebraska City N. T. July 8, 1858. Passed Fort Kearny N. T. in
good condition July 29, 1858. Containing 1500 Sacks Oats & 100
Pack Saddles."

In February 1865 two Germans filled a wagon box with water and oyst-
ers, these freezing into a solid lump, and freighted from Omaha to Den-
ver. It was a most risky adventure, for Indians were very unfriendly at
that time. The men must have made money, providing they ever reached
Denver, for they were selling oysters to soldiers at the forts along
the way for $2.50 per quart; they must have paid less than 50¢ per quart
in Omaha.

Mr. Bruffey tells of a man who drove over five hundred turkeys to
Denver in 1863. His wagon freight consisted of saelled corn. The
flock traveled rapidly when the wind blew from the east, but slow pro-
gress was made when the wind blew from the west. The freighter did well
in this enterprise.

Judge H. P. Bennet writing from Auraria (Denver) March 21, 1860,
said, "Cats are scarce; so numerous and destructive are the mice that
Grimalkin is well nigh being made an object of worship." So greatly
was Mr. Bennet annoyed at times that he was "led to exclaim, as Uncle
Dick, of Shakespeare times did:

"'A cat! A cat! my kingdom for a cat!!'

And again:

"'Oh for a thousand cats, to bring
These cussed mice to taw, etc. etc.'"

101 Ware, op. cit., 537-538.
103 H. P. Bennet, "Letter, General Items of Interest" in Peoples Press,
April 13, 1860.
Whether as the result of Mr. Bennet's letter or not a load of cats was freighted to Denver from Mills County, Iowa by a Mr. Christie.\footnote{104}

Onions sold for thirty cents a pound at Denver in 1865. Mr. Tyson ventured to supply the market in a big way. He loaded his wagons at Atchison, Kansas, paying a dollar and a half a bushel for the onions. This was in November. He sold his frost bitten onions in Denver the next spring at fifteen cents a bushel. "I came out so far behind that I never tried to figure it out," Mr. Tyson concluded.\footnote{105}

One freighter had considerable experience hauling apples from the Missouri River to Denver. On a trip in the fall of 1862 the apples were frozen slightly and sold for only four dollars a bushel in Denver. Expenses were hardly made on that trip or on the following trip. But in the winter of 1864-1865 the apple market was exceptionally good in the mountains, because of the light freight traffic. Indians were on the war-path. Mr. Hadley, an apple freighter, succeeded in reaching Denver by mid-winter with a large train out of Fort Kearny and sold his apples at the neat price of twenty dollars per bushel, or one dollar and a half per dozen. He had taken extra precaution against freezing by lining the wagon box with paper and by packing the apples in bran. In the fall of the same year Mr. Hadley made two more trips to Denver, and sold his apples for fifteen dollars per bushel.\footnote{106}

Cattle were driven across the plains for the markets in the west. A Mr. Gibson made a number of trips. The herd would number from six hundred to a thousand head and were accompanied by twenty to twenty-five men and several freight wagons loaded with provisions. The drivers were all mounted; the wagons were oxen drawn.\footnote{107}

\footnote{104} Tyson, "Letter," op. cit.
\footnote{105} Tyson, "Freighting to Denver," op. cit., 257-258.
\footnote{106} Hadley, op. cit., 273, 274, 277, 278.
In the spring of 1858 the freighting firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell agreed to supply the "Army of Utah" with three thousand five hundred cattle. These were to be delivered in lots of some two hundred fifty head to each lot. On a twenty day notice the firm contracted to increase the number from three thousand five hundred to ten thousand. It was to receive a price of seven dollars and a half per hundred pounds. The animals were to be supplied from the ox-teams. 108

It seems convenient just here to list a few of the companies and individuals that participated in the business of overland freighting during this period. An attempt is made to list these according to the base from which they freighted. 109

**Atchison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stebbins &amp; Porter</td>
<td>Dennison &amp; Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burr &amp; Company</td>
<td>J. C. Galbraith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George W. Howe</td>
<td>Whitehead &amp; Cooper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Brothers</td>
<td>E. K. Blair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. W. Bridgman</td>
<td>Roper &amp; Wesbit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison Brothers</td>
<td>Henry Reisner</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. C. Peters</td>
<td>P. K. Purcell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Addoms</td>
<td>R. E. Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George I. Stebbins</td>
<td>John C. Bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. Home</td>
<td>Giles B. Buck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos Howell</td>
<td>Charles Raber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nebraska City**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russell, Majors &amp; Waddell</td>
<td>Coe &amp; Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth Ward</td>
<td>Gilman Brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John D. Clayton</td>
<td>R. W. McComas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. L. &amp; R. D. Simpson</td>
<td>Henry &amp; Alex. Carlisle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John H. Maxon</td>
<td>W. E. Dillon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses U. Payne</td>
<td>Hosford &amp; Gaynon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. Fulton</td>
<td>B. J. Newsom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

108 Senate Executive Document, 35th Congress, 1st Session, XII, No. 46 (April 15, 1858), Serial No. 929, 2-4.
The overland freighting business grew to gigantic size. Many official records have been destroyed, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to give an accurate summary of the growth of the business by years. Therefore, no attempt is made to present a statistical report of the business.

110 Harvey, op. cit., 5; Sydenham, op. cit., 164.
STREET SCENE EASTERN BASE

From Alexander Majors' Seventy Years on the Frontier
but sufficient data will be given to show the magnitude of the enter-
prise that occupied the time of thousands of men during this period.

One writer has said that the "bull whackers constituted an army...their oxen a host." The amount of freight that was moved by the slow overland trains is incalculable. During the spring of 1858 trains were departing daily from their eastern bases and heading toward the moun-
tains. The firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell for the same year used 3,500 wagons, and more than 40,000 head of oxen and about 1000 mules; they employed 4,000 drivers. From June 8, 1858 to September 21, 1858 fifty-two trains westward arrived at Fort Kearny. These trains carried government stores and they either continued on to Fort Laramie or to Utah, or they were unloaded at the fort. There were 1290 wagons in the fifty-two trains. Four trains of the fifty-two arrived on August 6; they comprised 101 wagons. There were three trains each day for August 8, August 21, and September 13.

To transport the supplies for the "Army of Utah" 46,896 oxen and more than 6,000 mules hauled the 4,956 wagons that carried these supplies from the Missouri River to Camp Floyd fifty miles below Salt Lake City. It was a pull of 1,250 miles and the one firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell transported 16,000,000 pounds of army stores and received for their labor the sum of $1,700,000. After unloading at Camp Floyd the wagons were pulled to Salt Lake City where they were "placed as near as they could stand to each other in the suburbs of the city"; they "cover-
ed several acres of ground." The firm mentioned above owned at the

111 Pelzer, op. cit., 140.
112 Barns, op. cit., 206.
113 Nebraska City News, May 22, 1858.
114 Majors, op. cit., 143; Day-book of Fort Kearny, N. T. op. cit.
116 Majors, op. cit., 143-144,77; Nebraska City News, March 27, 1858.
117 Majors, op. cit., 144.
height of its business 75,000 oxen and 6,250 wagons. 118 Mr. Pelzer has the courage to state that "such freighting firms were numerous." 119 It is very doubtful indeed if any other firm equaled it in the Platte Valley; at least it did not operate at the same time as did the firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell.

In 1860 the big wagons entered Denver by the score. Sometimes fifty or more would arrive in one day. 120 At east bound passenger of that year reported "1830 freight wagons" between Fort Kearny and Denver heavily loaded and westbound. 121

Between the dates of April 25 to October 13, 1860 Mr. Majors' freighting business had this record:

- Pounds transported: 2,782,258
- Oxen used: 5,687
- Wagons used: 515
- Mules used: 72
- Men employed: 602

The United States Census Schedules for 1860, Nebraska Territory, record 134 consecutive names of men whose profession is listed as teamster. There are many other teamsters listed but these 134 names are in one unbroken group and occupy four of the big census pages. 123

The same Census Schedules 124 contain the following interesting data respecting only a few of the old freighters:

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118 Paxson, Last Frontier, 190.
119 Pelzer, op. cit., 140.
120 Nebraska City News, December 15, 1860. (Reprint from the Rocky Mountain News.)
121 Huntsman's Echo, Golden Issue, October 26, 1860.
122 Nebraska City News, November 24, 1860; J. Sterling Morton, Illustrated History of Nebraska, edited by Albert Watkins and George L. Miller (Lincoln, 1911), I, 106.
123 United States Census Schedules 1860 Nebraska Territory, Nebraska State Historical Society Library N317.82 X013, 232-235.
124 Ibid., 410-420.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Value Real Estate</th>
<th>Value Personal Prop.</th>
<th>Mules</th>
<th>Oxen</th>
<th>Value of Live Stock</th>
<th>Produce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Majors</td>
<td>225,000</td>
<td>791,150</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>283,950</td>
<td>30,000 bu. corn, 800 tons hay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Byram</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Byram</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Muckolls</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Hawke</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3,040</td>
<td>2,200 bu. corn.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Corbin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From May 31 to June 26, 1862, 632 big wagons were pulled out of Nebraska City carrying an aggregate of 3,160,000 pounds of freight. A presee item of an eastern base, in 1862, stated that 2000 freight wagons were in use annually between that city and the west.

Mr. Rolfe reporting for the same year said he men on a return trip east 2,514 wagons between Fort Kearny and Denver.

During the summer of 1864 "there poured into Denver no less than a thousand tons of merchandise a day." This is a remarkable record when it is recalled that 1864 was a most difficult year on the trail because of Indian hostility.

The year 1865 found the warehouses at the eastern bases crowded with goods awaiting transportation across the prairies. The 1865 Census Report shows what activity the freighting business had enjoyed for that year at Nebraska City:

125 Nebraska City News, June 28, 1862.
126 Ibid., August 30, 1862.
127 Ibid., July 12, 1862.
128 Ware, op. cit., 141-142.
Pounds of freight transported 31,445,428
Oxen used 50,712
Wagons used 7,365
Mules used 7,231
Men employed 8,385

Travellers on the trail in the month of July 1865, had constantly in view the giant wagons of the overland carrier that transported goods to the merchants, to the miners, to the traders, to the forts, to the army and to the settlers on the frontier. 131

The summer of 1866 was a busy freighting season. Mr. Pelzer132 quoting James F. Meline writes, "It would be within bounds to say that one hundred and fifty wagons pass west daily, during the season." 133

Great quantities of merchandise came into Lincoln by overland traffic in 1868. The bulk of this freight consisted of dry goods, groceries and lumber for the Capitol. "Mr. I. B. Compton counted twenty-one wagons loaded with lumber between Nebraska City and the Nemaha, bound for Lincoln." 134

In 1863 wagon trains began to diverge from the old water route of the North Platte and kept a more westerly direction toward Cheyenne. 135 By June, of 1868, Mr. Alexander Majors was busy freighting wagon-trains of supplies to the graders of the Union Pacific Railroad. 136

As the construction progressed on the railroad, freight was carried over it to its constantly advancing terminal. Wagon-trains picked up

130 Hugh J. Dobbs, History of Gage County, Nebraska (Lincoln, 1918), p. 79.
132 Pelzer, op. cit., 146-147. This would seem to be the peak of the season rather than the average.
133 Nebraska City News, February 14, 1868; Ibid., February 17, 1868.
134 Ibid., April 20, 1868.
135 Ibid., June 19, 1868.
the merchandise at this point and hauled it to its destination. "As
the railroad lengthened the wagon routes were correspondingly short-
ened."

Earlier in the chapter mention was made of eastbound freight. The
proportion of this freight as compared to westbound freight was infini-
tely small. There was some cargo, however, that was carried east by
the returning wagon-trains. Furs were shipped east from the mountains,
and great numbers of horses were brought back with the trains. 137

A news item of 1862 states that thirteen wagons loaded with 4,000
hides arrived at Nebraska City from the west. 138 In the same year 400
bales of buffalo robes were shipped by one train from Fort Laramie to
an eastern base on the Missouri River. The train spent thirty-one days
on the trail. 139 Ore from the mines was hauled east by the returning
freighters. 140

Many of the trains returned with empty wagons. The three following
news items are exemplary of the large number that appeared in the papers
of the eastern bases:

"Fifteen wagons, belonging to King & Wood arrived Omaha,
Sunday, direct from Denver." 141

"M. R. Frost & Co.'s freighting train from Denver arrived
yesterday Jan 17." 142

"From Denver. A. Hanover with 24 wagons, Wm. Hays 10 wag-
ons, Jesse Taylor 10 wagons, Ingram 20 wagons, J. B. Doyle 13
wagons. All came here to load and return." 143

136 Fulton, op. cit., 263.
137 Nebraska City News, July 23, 1859; Peoples Press, April 13, 1860.
138 Nebraska City News, May 17, 1862.
139 Ibid., June 29, 1862.
140 "Historical Notes," Nebraska History Magazine, op. cit., 121.
141 Omaha Nebraskan, October 27, 1860.
142 Nebraska City News, January 18, 1862.
143 Ibid., June 7, 1862.
Much of the equipment was sold near the point of destination. The Mormons purchased great numbers of wagons and cattle. 144 Hundreds of wagons that had cost $175 each were sold to the Mormon authorities for $10 a piece. The iron of the wagons was used "for the manufacture of nails." 145

Many of the oxen became food for the Indian tribes or were sold to emigrants, "or were transformed into roasts and fillets at the various army posts." 146

During the months on the trail the oxen had no feed but grass, but during the winter months the herds that were not disposed of in some way at the end of the western journeys were wintered in valleys of the mountains, on the plains, or were driven into winter quarters where they were fed hay that had been cut for the purpose. Several hundreds of cattle were sometimes wintered in Iowa. 147

There were ups and downs in the freighting business as there must be in every business. For the most part profits were returned. Much depended, of course, on the selection of goods and the selling of the same. This is providing the freighter owned the merchandise. Most of the freighters carried only for others, but oftentimes the merchants themselves were their own freighters. At other times the freighter purchased goods at an eastern base and hauled them west selling same at a profit.

144 Greeley, op. cit., 24-25; Rolfe, op. cit., 286.
145 Majors, op. cit., 144.
146 Pelzer, op. cit., 139.
147 Sydenham, op. cit., 174; Majors, op. cit., 144; Clarke, op. cit., 301; Nebraska City News, November 12, 1859.
if possible at the other end of the journey. One example of this class of freighter will suffice:

"...loaded the wagons with my own merchandise for the Denver market....I closed out my goods, realizing a good profit. The third day after my arrival, having received something over $10,000 in Cherry Creek gold dust, soldered up in two-pound oyster cans, rolled up in my blankets and strapped securely at the back of my saddle, I mounted my mule and started to overtake my teams."149

The fortunate freighter was the one who had bought his equipment cheaply, paying from $50 to $100 for teams and wagons, and then selling out when wagons brought $200 to $250 each and when mules sold from $400 to $600 a span, and when oxen sold from $150 to $200 a yoke. This some of the freighters did in the winter of 1864-1865. But during the year 1865 freight rates began to go down, prices of equipment dropped about 40 per cent, and "many parties were completely ruined."150 Big profits were made and big losses were taken. Mr. Majors' firm had profits of three hundred thousand dollars for the two year period of 1855 to 1856.151

The Utah war, said one writer, "made the fortunes of those who secured the government contracts" for the freighting of stores and provisions for the army.152 Charges have been made that the freighters "cheated the government to their heart's content and amassed fortunes with ease."153

148 Clarke, op. cit., 305; Andreas, op. cit., II, 1203; Rolfe, op. cit., 291; Morton, op. cit., I, 590-591.
150 Hadley, op. cit., 277.
151 Majors, op. cit., 141-142.
152 Bancroft, op. cit., 498.
153 Bentley, op. cit., 45.
But the freighters suffered big losses at times. There were, moreover, small losses because of theft, for "bull whackers" sometimes sold the merchandise of the train to ranchmen along the route, or they might empty cases of bitters and barrels of whisky refilling same with Platte River water.

The Fort Kearny Day-book shows how the inspection of the government trains resulted many times in finding losses and damages of goods.

"Asst. Qr. Mr's. Office
Fort Kearny,
Aug. 18th, '58.

Train No. 70, Utah No. 52 - 25 Wagons arrived at this post on the 16th Inst. The following is the endorsement on B/L --
Received Fort Kearny, N. T. August 16th 1858 the Articles Specified in the Bill of Lading in good order & condition with the exception of thirty four sacks of Flour which are more or less damaged (probably by having been wet) and one half barrel of whiskey which does not contain but half of the required quantity and which articles will have to be submitted to the Board of Survey.

(Signed) W. L. Cabell
Capt & A. Q. M. 16 USA


"Fort Kearny, Aug. 18th, 1858
Train No. 71, Utah, No. 53 - 25 Wagons was unloaded at this Post and B/L was endorsed as follows:

Received the within goods in good order and condition with the exception of the following articles, Viz;
108 one hundred & eight Sacks of Flour
1 one keg of Whiskey
1 one Sack of Beans
1 one Barrel Hd. Bread - damaged
3 three Barrels Hd. Bread - deficient

which was in bad condition and which was presented to a board of Survey. See Proceedings of the Board.

(Signed) W. L. Cabell
Capt & A. Q. M. USA"
Train No. 81 - Fort Kearny No. 3 - 25 Wagons arrived at this post today with contents all in good order & condition except 5 bundles Shingles deficient. Said train contained as viz; 700 Sacks of Corn, 116 Kegs Nails, 3 Box Qr. Mr. Stores, 4 Kegs white Lead, 1 Bbl Oil, 3 Bales Hair, 300 Bundles Shingles. 157

Besides the heavy losses caused by Indian depredations, which losses, without doubt, amounted to many, many thousands of dollars, there were other heavy losses which came in various ways.

In 1857, three of Mr. Majors' trains were captured by the Mormons and all were destroyed except for the best wagon and team of each train which the train captain and men were allowed to choose and to use for their return. "The loss to the army was about five hundred thousand pounds of Government supplies," and it put the army on short rations for several months. 158

Mr. Majors' firm suffered a cattle loss of $300,000, in 1857, because of a severe winter and a lack of sufficient feed for the stock in the mountains. The same year one thousand of its oxen were scattered from their feeding grounds west of Fort Kearny by the Indians; it was a complete loss. The firm's biggest disaster came in the winter of 1859-1860, when 3,500 select oxen valued at $150,000 were starved and frozen to death in Ruby Valley, Nevada, where the herd had been driven for the winter. 159

Writing of the severe winter of 1864, Mr. Lyon 160 said, "We saw many dead cattle along the way -- in fact, almost whole trains of cattle froze that winter."

157 Ibid.
158 Majors, op. cit., 142-143.
159 Ibid., 142, 144-145.
160 Lyon, op. cit., 269.
Clarke & Brothers, freighters, had a number of animals and other property stolen, by Indians, from a train on the trail in 1865. The loss totaled $9,547.00. The United States court of claims, however, settled this bill in full, paying same in July 1898. The money for the payment was taken, it seems, from Indian funds.161

Late in the year of 1865 a snow storm and a band of Indians caused the loss of every animal of a mule train that had corralled for the night on the open prairie. There was nothing for the drivers to do but to walk back to their base on the river and to inform the owner of the outfit of the misfortune. The loss of the mules was estimated at $40,000. Because of the condition of the roads and the condition of the weather the wagons, which contained thousands of dollars worth of goods, were left for many days on the plains before a disposal was made of them.162

Quicksands took its toll occasionally; an entire wagon with all its freight would sink out of sight. If the contents were three tons of flour the loss amounted to approximately $1,200 in 1865; if calculated in the selling price of flour at Denver of that year; flour sold there "at $20 for a bag weighing ninety-eight pounds."163

Much has been written by others of the experiment made to move the big freight wagons by the use of steam. It is not the intention here to give a lengthy account of that experiment; a brief mention of it will be sufficient.

161 Clarke, op. cit., 303-305.
162 Bentley, op. cit., 48.
163 Fulton, op. cit., 263; Bratt, op. cit., 64-65.
In July 1862 the "Steam Wagon" was landed at Nebraska City. Its owner was General J. R. Brown who had hoped to use the engine in the carrying of freight and passengers "over ordinary roads," and plans were made to establish a permanent schedule with two outfits between the Missouri River and Denver "each Wagon making the round trip in two weeks." After a trial or two the engine started west, pulling "three road wagons containing five tons of freight and two cords of wood... About twelve miles from the city one of the cranks of the driving shaft broke." That was the end of the "Steam Wagon." A marker stands today near the spot where the breakdown occurred.

With the coming of the railroads to the great plains region the days of overland freighting were about gone. The long trains of the huge canvass covered wagons were soon to disappear; the long teams of oxen, mules and horses were soon to leave the yoke and the harness of the dusty trails; the long whips of the skilful "bull whackers" were soon to crack for the last "pull out." Freighters, wagon-masters, teamsters, herders, messengers, and helpers successfully had performed their duties in the pioneer period of a great transportation system. The commerce of the trails gave place to the commerce of the rails.

Overland Freighting in the Platte Valley ceased, ceased from the business of traffic on the plains, ceased from the winding road of the open prairie, but ceased only to exist again on the history pages of the land that gave it life.

164 Nebraska City News, July 19, 1862; Ibid., July 26, 1862; Ibid., August 2, 1862; Ibid., August 30, 1862.
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