

Blazing The Oregon Trail.

An Epic Poem, by Cyrus H. Walker.

The oldest white man ^{living} born west of the Rocky Mountains.

Sound we peans of praise for Americans bold,
Whose fame as we know is a century old;
That fourteenth of May, eighteen hundred and four,
From near where Missouri's stained waters out-pour
And mingle with the Mississippi's clear tide,
The queen of our rivers, and America's pride;
Start to blaze a plain trail, to a far distant shore
Where the Columbia and the Ocean meet with a roar.
Well skilled were these men, in the backwoods mans' lore,
As they launch barge and boats from a dear home land shore,
Gave Meriwether Lewis and kindly William Clark,
Whose deeds blazed the ^{wild} West: as gleam search-lights when 'tis dark.
And with them, at first were near thirty strong men,
All the hopes that inspired them we never can ken,
'Tis enough that we know they were daring and true
Picked out for such service as comes to but few.
After a long, hot summer of hardships and toil
They make winter's camp on Mandan Indians' home soil

In some rude cabins built from Cottonwood trees
A stockade in front, Fat Mandan if you please,
Here the long winter months dragged slowly away,
With the cold as of North land for many a day,
But safe and secure from any and all foes,
They in a measure enjoyed their enforced repose.
Here also to cheer them, their suddenly came
A brave dusky heroine, Sa-a-ja-we-a by name
The 'Bird Women' true who oft guided the band
Until they all reached the long wished for land.
On February eleventh came a boy, who beguiled
With its cooing, the hours, or it cried, or it smiled,
And its mother became a great favorite with all,
Glad to go where she sent them or come at her call.
When the breezes of spring freed the ice filtered streams,
And the sun warmed the hillsides, with its life giving beams,
New boats were made ready, the toil to renew,
And the up river journey once more to pursue,
While the barge with ten men, sought loved home again,
Loaded with treasures from river, hill ^{valley} ~~pass~~ and plain.
On May ^{the} twenty sixth from highest hills, appeared
Far in the hazy distance, whose lofty peaks appeared,

The shimmering "Shining Mountains" with hoary summits crowned
 Our towering rugged Rockies, famed all the world around.
 June third the river forks and all repeat the cry
 Which is the true Missouri? the northern branch, and why?
 "See how it boils and rolls" said one; others different thought
 And searching proved, the southern was, the one they sought.
 Lewis, the northern branch, by flowing cliffs inwalled,
 A cousin to honor "Maria's river" called.
 Before they leave the forks, from highest-points between,
 Countless buffalo, elk, and antelope were seen.
 A clear swift-stream they found, by Clark, was ^{"The"} Judith named,
 Still mindful of a true love, nor can he well be blamed.
 June twelfth the mountains loomed, as never seen before,
 Peak rising after peak, high as the eagles soar.
 The next day Lewis saw the great-Missouri falls,
 The first-civilized men, as my memory recalls,
 Billed with awe and wonder, he pondered its might
 And wished his were a master hand to pencil the sight.
 These were rude wagons framed, a task not one of ease,
 With wheels sawed from off some cottonwood trees,
 On them goods and boats were hauled, by ^{the} willing men,
 Over an eighteen mile portage, to smooth water again.

Thus a full month was spent in planning and toil
 As they worked, pulled and pushed, on an unfriendly soil.
 On July the fourth booming sounds in the hills,
 Seemed to chant Liberty's praise, from the rocks and the hills,
 Boats were launched once again the fifteenth of July,
 And the men urged them on to a ^{change} dawning night,
 Until in due time the "Three Forks" were found,
 Where some days were spent, in looking around,
 The streams were named for Washington friends, good and true,
 The "Jefferson," "Gallatin," "Dolly" Madison too,
 Then ascending the Jefferson increasing in force,
 On the Bitter Root mountains they find its source.
 August the seventh they camped at the rock "Beaver head"
 That resembles the head of a beaver 'tis said,
 (This day too, was born, in far North Yarmouth, Maine,
 My father, to a life that was not spent in vain,)
 Near the divide they drink from a spring clear and cold
 Quite close to one flowing to the west, we are told,
 There camp in the "gem of the mountains" Idaho,
 Whose gold glittering streams to the Pacific flow,
 Now to see a javera a joyful day comes,
 As she meets the Shoshones, in their ^{wild} wigwam homes

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Glad to quit her own people, and brother most dear,
From whom she was carried a captive, in fear,
Here Clark exploring seventy miles finds the Snake
That he named Lewis river, if I don't mistake,
But finding no pass, he returns to the main camp.
Then all go forward on their wearisome tramp,
And in truth through the mountains blaze a plain trail,
One that in the future years, would be of avail,
Ere they leave, boats are sunk, and cached are some goods,
Indian horses are bought, to pack baggage and foods,
August thirtieth the trail leads on the Bitter Root,
A range never trod before by a whiteman's foot:
Thence down through a valley bordering the same
Whose river the Clark was called, in honor of his name,
Then they take the Lolo trail for Nez Perce land
Where horses are left with that brave friendly band,
In canoes the trip down the clear water was made
To the Snake, where years after Lewis' site was laid,
Then on to the lovely Columbia and adown
To the dangerous "Dalles", where precipices frown
And the river breaks through a "narrows" indeed,
That the canoes shot over with terrific speed.

Soon the Indian village of Wisham was reached,
 Where the boats for a time were once more beached.
 'Tis now Dallas City, but then, home of those untaught,
 Whose children, I'm sure, of the negro ^{old} knew naught;
 For Billy Chinook then about twelve winters old,
 With others, ran in terror, as to me he oft told,
 To hide from black York, ^{thought} called no being of earth,
 A scene that must have provoked from the whites, greatest mirth,
 Here, as elsewhere in the Poland Empire as 'tis named
 Grows the sweetest flower, they finding, made it famed,
 They called it 'Clarke's Royal' in honor of our Clark,
 Its hue is a brilliant-pink, deserving of remark.
 On down the Columbia, past the Hood River we know,
 They came to the "Cascades" where angry waters flow
 In a mad race to find a home in the rolling deep
 Through an entrance in which, largest steamships safely sweep,
 Over these rapids, boats and men's safety ride,
 To a point where the river feels the force of ocean's tide.
 Along the Cascades, and for many miles below
 Is found as grand a scenery, as any land can show,
 Though heeding this, they toil on with more willing hands,
 And make camp opposite where Vancouver now stands.

On November the seventh, the ocean was seen

With a stretch of the Columbia in between,

Then ^{a glad} camp was made ^{quite} near the ~~blatsof~~ beach,

And the ^{long} wished for goal was ^{now} ^{within} almost in reach.

Christmas day, seven ~~small~~ cabins were finished, ^{pioneer} style,

New Years ^{we} the palisades, for protection the while.

A ^{small} cabin was built, near the bold "Pillanook Head",

To make salt; of which they had but little, 'tis said.

In this fort they spend a winter, quite ~~raining~~ mild,

With sometimes a storm, when seas were raging and wild,

And their thundering waves could be distinctly heard,

From the camp; with the ^{wildly} cry of the ^{sea} ~~ocean~~ bird;

But well sheltered and fed in their rude cabin homes

They enjoy themselves, until the glad spring time comes.

'Twas here they first learned the Chinook jargon tongue,

One that is still quite often both spoken and sung.

A whale on the shore broke the dull monotony,

Which faithful Sacajawea was permitted to see

Dear Fort-Blatsof was left - on March the twenty third

And to Chief Coboway, spoken ^{the} ^{last} parting word.

Then, after some days journey, at the Sandy ^{they} camped

A stream along which many pioneers have tramped.

Hearing of a river they had unheeding passed,
 Clark returned and found our bright-Willamette at last.
 Then going up a dozen miles, he slept one night.
 Not far from our world-famed Portland's commanding site
 Here finds a fir tree three hundred and eighteen feet high
 In a dark forest, with others standing close by.

Going back to the Sandy camp, the journey was renewed,
 Past the many places they had already viewed,
 Of ^{the} homeward journey we need but little tell
 Suffice to say they reached Saint-Louis safe and well,
 September the twenty third, eighteen hundred and six,
 A date that it were well, in memory to fix.

While in the west among the heathen bands,
 They told them of God and of His great commands,
 And Indian's heard of the white man's book of heaven,
 And of its saving truths, we call the Gospel Leaven,
 For anxious years they wait, then some Nez Percés go,
 To learn more of this God and His teachings - Know,
 For many days they search, till a Christian heard their plaint -
 As wearied with the quest, their cherished hopes grew faint.
 Glad day for them, when two Mission Boards, some teachers sent -
 Over a trackless waste, across the continent -

And for a time the mission work of ye ago seemed dead -
But after years brought fruitage that we reap in the soil -

First came the ^{two} Lees in eighteen thirty four
And with them Shepherd, Edwards, and later many more,
In thirty five came Parker to prepare the way,
When in eighteen thirty six came Whisman, Spalding, Gray;
And with the two first named was each a loving bride

First white women to cross Rocky Mountain divide,
In thirty eight came Walker, Eells, Smith, and Gray again,
And their heroic brides, with many mountain men,
One of the brides my mother was, who died in ninety seven
The last one of the mission bands, to go home to heaven.

In the year forty seven, November twenty ninth day
Three treacherous baguses broke forth in deadly fray,
And murdered ^{Doctor} Whisman, his wife, and twelve more.

Then followed Indian wars and fightings o'er and o'er.

This time has wrought great changes in our grand Northwest -
For countless homes are seen the brightest and the best,
While cruel savage hordes, once on direst murder bent -
All have to peaceful reservation homes been sent -

And Portland "Rose City", with the Pacific Northwest -
Sends the world a greeting for the truest and the best -
And see at close of a hundred years, by our Willamette bright,
The grand palaces we've built, that captivate the sight -

While Sacajawea's statue
Through her fame may reach the earth's remote bounds
along the Fair grounds

And in them placed the choicest-treasures of all lands
Wrought-by nature, or the workman's skillful hands,
Across "Gull's Lake" is built ^{"The Seal"} in grandest style
To honor those who, o'er mountain range, through deep defile,
Or down rivers turbulent and swift; or frightful cascade,
The journey to the great-Pacific ocean made.
And with all this is seen; mountain, forest, river, lake,
That combined, a charming, beautiful landscape make.
Hail! glorious country, hail! fearless Oregon,
There is no fairer land that the sun shines upon,
All praise to our God who gave us our great power
He is our refuge, and strength, and our strong tower.

Albany Oregon

Lynus H. Walker

~~May~~ 1905
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