

A Portion of “Chapter 1 – My History” by Rev. Elkanah Lamb,
from “Elkanah and Jane’s Long’s Peak House, Guest and
Climbing Register”

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I was born January 1, 1832 and reared in the wild woodlands of the State of Indiana, County of St. Joseph, South Bend being the county seat. Here many days of my early experiences were spent in wandering through these dark, dense forests in lonely enjoyment, eyes and ears open to the voice of nature's whispering winds, running streams, and shimmering lakes, my youthful mind in feelings and affection harmonizing with the squirrels' chatter, the songs of birds, and the fragrance of wild flowers, conspiring in this scene of rustic beauty to attune the heart of nature's lover to thanks and praise. What visions of beauty and grand possibilities then and there opened to my longing nature, pointing to a final goal to be gained by perseverance, diligence, and honest integrity.

When pulpit and press tried to sanction and sanctify slavery as a divine institution, my father kept a station on the "underground railroad," which assisted fugitives from the South on their way to freedom. We then lived nine miles from South Bend and sixteen miles from the Michigan line, where colored people were free. Many escaped from Kentucky and Virginia, following the North Star till they reached Michigan. This main route led by our home, my father being a self-appointed agent at this station. He did not receive any great remuneration, but held this office by virtue of a higher court of human rights, and thanks and everlasting gratitude were the coin he received from fugitives fleeing from the grievous lash of unfeeling, inhuman taskmasters-masters of cruelty, vice and immorality, sometimes selling their own flesh and blood, their own offspring from

the auction block, as witnessed in St. Louis when there several years since. One morning, while holding this office, some covered wagons drove up to the house, and a gentleman came in to ascertain if the coast was clear. A few words with father (mainly spoken in cipher) settled the matter to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. Then the unloading commenced. These fugitives were from Kentucky. For weeks they had hidden by day and traveled by night, guided by the North Star, seeking the State of Michigan, where they could enjoy human rights and freedoms.

After a brief rest for themselves and horses, the train moved on towards freedom's shrine, which they reached that evening, and where they were made welcome by former friends who had escaped over the same route. Here quite a colony of former slaves, close to Niles, Michigan, living in their peaceful cabins, cultivating little patches of ground, worshiping God and singing songs of freedom, as all mankind have an inherent right to do, oppressive laws to the contrary notwithstanding.

From time immemorial the glitter of gold has exerted a wonderful influence on the mind of man, impelling a Cortez, an Almagro, and a Pizarro to the field of adventure. California in 1850, Colorado in 1860, invited and induced multiplied thousands to leave their Eastern homes, to cross the plains, range the mountains, and prospect streams for hidden treasures of shining gold. Alaska also evidences the fact that man will risk life and health, and dare death in order to obtain gold and silver. The diamonds fields of South Africa have also played their part in exciting man's desire for riches and the gathering of wealth. This, however, was not the chief factor in our minds that prompted us to foreign territory; but a desire to see the Western plains, the buffaloes, wild Indians, and the Rocky Mountains.

Accordingly, on the ninth day of April, 1860, we left our homes in Linn County, Kansas, and started for the Rocky Mountains. Our party consisted of five persons-myself, David Lamb, Enos Mills, Sr. and wife Ann, and Enoch Mills. We went through Lawrence to get our supplies, then took our course up the Kaw River as far west as Manhattan, there crossing and striking a northwesternly direction until we came to the main freight

road leading across the plains. This great thoroughfare follows the Platte River all the way to the city of Denver.

For several days the weather was pleasant and the road was thronged with travelers. Caravan after caravan, ox teams, horse teams, mule teams, some on foot propelling a cart to carry their supplies, others leading a broncho pony that carried blankets, crackers, and groceries, all intent on reaching the Rocky Mountains; a jolly company.

One afternoon, just before we got to Ft. Kearney, it commenced raining on us quite briskly, and then terminated in a regular snowstorm-a first class blizzard. The wind joined its fury to the fast falling snow, adding immensely to the chilling drama. The night fast approaching, we were, of necessity, compelled to move down to the river and camp for the night. The storm increased and we had no timber for shelter, much less for fuel; a little water locust and some willow twigs were the sum total of our fuel.

Having some cold biscuits, we managed to make coffee and broil some bacon over our twig fire. As the storm was coming from the northwest, we turned our wagons to face the southeast, then tying our ponies on either side of the wagon tongue and dividing our blankets with them, we lay in our wagons over night, shivering and longing for day. But when day came there was no abatement of the storm. We hitched up our shivering ponies and started on.

About 10:00 a.m., the storm ceased its fury, and old Sol came out with shining face, making us as glad as the inhabitants of the Arctic regions are after six months' night. Sometimes on the Platte River road we came in contact with very sandy stretches that made heavy pulling for failing ponies and horses. We then would fasten a long cable rope to the tongue of the wagons, and in pairs of from eight to twelve arrange ourselves on both sides of the rope, then pulling, shouting, and laughing we helped our weary teams very much, and made the silent plains vibrate with our cheering.

On Sunday morning, April 24, we got our first view of the Rocky Mountains, ninety miles distant from our present encampment, Fremont's Orchard (so called because

of a large cluster of scrubby cottonwoods growing close to the river). In the distance the snow-capped range looked like an embankment of fleecy clouds piled up in the horizon towards heaven's blue. Here we camped one day and night, enjoying quite a sensational episode.

On this particular day, a large number of Indians visited our camp. Seemingly they were on the lookout for something, watching our every movement, especially among our ponies and horses. We took pains to feed the red devils in order to allay any impending evil against us. In the evening we saw numbers of these redskins come to the summit of the bluffs just south of our camp, less than one-half mile distant.

They would watch for a while, then fall back, and others would take their places. Then, to strengthen our suspicion, an old Indian came into our camp about sundown, looking like one of Dante's dark characters incarnated for devilish purposes. He was sour and uncommunicative, save by signs and uncouth gesticulations, running his hands from his mouth up to the top of his head, then down to his mouth again, trying to illustrate (as we afterward learned) a bridle and the bit in the mouth. Finally, with an emphatic, impressive threat, he drew his hand across his throat, and left.

These demonstrations were sufficient to arouse our suspicion and prepare us for measures of defense. Thirty-four men against perhaps one hundred redskins looked rather doubtful, to say the least. Nevertheless, we made all possible preparation within our limited means, getting our wagons all in a circle, horses inside; and with every available gun, revolver, shovel, and pick, we armed ourselves for a possible, even probable, conflict with these wild, savage plainsmen. Our picket guard of six men was stationed outside the circle in proper positions to give timely warning; thus we rested on our arms until morning.

The only indication of an attack was made manifest about midnight, when we had two pickets patrolling the banks of the river. As there was an island about midway, the river was shallow at this place. Our pickets heard what seemed to be a cavalcade of horsemen starting from the northern shore; they came splashing through the water till

they got to the island, then seemed to halt for consultation. Our pickets fired their guns toward the island. This sent consternation into their ranks. A hasty retreat followed, and they went back quicker than they came. They found we were on guard.

We were glad when morning found all intact. After a well-relished breakfast, we started on our way for Denver. Every few miles there was a small squad of Indians by the roadside, scanning our company as we passed them.

When we reached Denver, this strange mystery in regard to the Indians' actions was made plain. A trio of young men from near Lawrence, Kansas, had started overland for the gold fields of the Rockies. Their outfit consisted of a light wagon, two small ponies, ten dollars' worth of grub, and a little money only. When nearing Kearney, one of the ponies concluded not to trudge any farther on these tiresome plains and, regardless of consequences, departed this life, leaving our Kansas boys stranded on the plains. Under the circumstances, go forward they could not, and go back they would not. To but a horse or pony they had not shekels sufficient, so in this dilemma they concluded to lay tribute on an Indian pony. This they did, then traveled all night, passing our party. The Indians, coming upon our party first, supposed, as a matter of course, that we were the aggressors. This explains their actions.

We saw the boys in Denver. They appeared quite jolly over this doubtful enterprise, although it might have resulted in serious trouble for us.

Here we are in the town of Denver, located on the banks of Cherry Creek and the Platte River, with a mixed population of eight or ten thousand. During our stay here we had the privilege of witnessing a war dance of the Indians. They had just returned from a successful war campaign and hunting expedition in the South Park country. Something less than one hundred of these uncouth redskins formed in a circle around a central director. This director resembled very much, in appearance, a resurrected Egyptian mummy, and looked to be at least one hundred years old. In his hand he had a staff of authority, with which he directed ceremonies. At a given signal on the tom-tom (a sort of drum), the circle started in monotonous revolution, chanting their "How-wa-ah!

how-wa-ah!" The somber pathos of this infernal ditty, mingled with the hoarse cadence of their tom-tom, presented a picture to the imagination that fully duplicated Dante's description of hell, with purgatory thrown in.

Such are the differences between the cultured and uncultured; the savage and the civilized. These children of the plains and forests have, for thousands of years, lived, reveled in, and enjoyed wild life, without development or advancement, and their history is lost in the dim mists of past ages, worse mystified by traditions and legends.

Our resting time over, we must now start on our journey for South Park, Tarryall, and the Blue River gold regions. We went to the express office to mail some letters before leaving, and we were politely informed by the postmaster that we must pay twenty-five cents per letter. We gave the dollar to send four letters. We thought this high pressure for boasted civilization; we must pay high for luxuries. This pony express carried letters only, from Denver City as far east as the Missouri River, leaving the office in the morning on a brisk, loping pony. This loping was kept up day and night for over five hundred miles, with relays, for every fifteen or twenty miles a fresh pony was brought out. Thus the swift-running mail was not delayed five minutes from Denver to the Missouri River, only sometimes Indian scares and depredations deranged scheduled time. Other express matter was carried by a four-horse coach, running day and night.

Our first day out from Denver brought us to an evergreen camping place on Bear Creek. Here there was an abundance of grass and a rippling stream of water-nature's sources to meet material wants of man and beast. We enjoyed this, our first introduction to nature's evergreen realm. The next day's diligent travel brought us to the South Platte River, fringed and decorated beyond artistic touch with spruce and balsam, contrasted with patches of aspen flowers, adding a sweet fragrance to this enchanting scene.

This was to me a scene and sense of delight not to be forgotten. Language does not express the intensity of my delight. While man's genius and executive ability have brought out and perfected wonderful displays in the realm of art, to my art, to my mind and taste there are mystic charms in the fields of nature transcending man's production

as greatly as infinity surpasses finite conceptions and productions.

Taking a lonely walk down this murmuring, musical stream while supper was being prepared, my mind was inspired with thanks and praise. The myriad voices of nature's sweet melodies in tiny flowers, in purling streams, in whispering winds sweeping through the forest's vistas like a great orchestra, thrilled the heart because of God's creative wisdom and power in forest, field, and flower. Then returning towards our campfires, after my ramble under the shining stars, I was ready, with vim, for coffee, apple sauce, and mountain sheep that our hunters had bagged that very day. In stealing this march and encampment in this silent, sylvan spot, there was no murmur of intrusion on nature's part, and no murmur of dissatisfaction on our company's part, for all were cheerful and happy.

The beauty of this scenery very much increased when we reached the eastern boundary line of South Park, which extends fifty miles north and south, and from ten to twenty miles east and west, surrounded with a wilderness of snow-capped mountains, seemingly blending with fleecy clouds in the wide eternity of space. Oh, how glorious to behold! Our train left these mountain heights, going down and crossing the Park, stopping here at Tarryall, our present objective point.

This place and stream were first called "Graball," because some three or four human hogs took possession of the entire camp, determined to monopolize all the gold down to earth's center, but the avalanche of new arrivals by hundreds broke up this selfish, avaricious program. This was our inviting and generous welcome to Tarryall.

Here miners were working like beavers for the golden calf. In this rough, rustic town of Tarryall are tangible evidences of man's resourceful nature, establishing that oft-repeated truism, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Habitations were constructed out of any and all available material, a rock ledge serving, in many instances, for one side of a habitation, logs for the other. Some huts were made of rough stone altogether; others were constructed from torn-up wagon boxes blended with canvas; others, less pretentious, were weather-boarded with pine branches. These temporary shelters were

almost invariably covered with poles and earth.

Within these primitive structures jolly miners ate their wild meat, bighorn, and deer, and slept the sleep of the weary, if not the just. Here, in the enjoyment of nature's freedom, not restricted by conventional customs or hampered by affected refinements, was indeed a status of life preferable to stereotyped customs with many false pretensions. Here are felt and seen, spontaneously, purity with its primitive frankness and cordiality; charity, pure and without ostentation; benevolence, without being galvanized with other motives. All up and down Tarryall stream miners' tents were stationed, decorating appendages of the busy throng of workers.

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