

Coon-Miller Diary 1847

The Diary of James Madison Coon and Nancy Iness (Miller) Coon on the Oregon Trail
from Mercer County, Illinois to Clackamas County, Oregon in 1847

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FORWARD

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The original entries to this document were derived from a Transcription by Mrs. Evah (Coon) Smith. Later additions, entries, and corrections are derived from a transcription by Leslie A. Haskin who interviewed Mr. James M. Coon, Jr., the youngest son of James and Nancy Coon. At the time of the Haskin transcription, the original diary was in the possession of the interviewee, James M. Coon, Jr., who was a taylor living at 105 First Street, Albany, Oregon, and was loaned to Leslie Haskin to be transcribed.

This rendition together with supplemental notes and clarifications is respectfully submitted by its transcriber, Robert Lewis, for the enjoyment and edification of those who delight in the adventure of real American History as it has been recorded by it's participants and preserved for posterity by their descendants.

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Notes taken from Coon and Miller family history records
in the possession of Robert Lewis

James Madison Coon, born Sept. 24th 1813 in Jefferson County, Kentucky, was the second son of a family of eight children - seven boys and one girl - born to Michael Coon, Jr. and Elizabeth (Kelly) Coon who were married on the 6th of April, 1803 in Fincastle, Botetourt County, Virginia. Michael was the descendant of hardy German immigrant stock who came from the upper Rhine River Valley to York County, Pennsylvania in 1738. Michael's father, Michael Sr. and six of his brothers were members of the "German Regiment" ("Pennsylvania DEUTSCH" not "Dutch") from York County, Pennsylvania during "The War of the Rebellion" (the Revolutionary War). His wife and James' mother, Elizabeth showed her fine Irish heritage with the great surname of Kelly and was the daughter of George Kelly of Fincastle, Botetourt County, Virginia.

Nancy Iness Miller, born on April 8th, 1827 in Montgomery County, Indiana, was the seventh child and fifth daughter of a family known to consist of at least thirteen children - five boys and eight girls - of John Miller, Sr. and Sarah Smith of Millersburg, Mercer County, Illinois. Nancy died 7 April, 1907 near Halsey, Linn Co., Oregon.

James and Nancy were married February 21 1847 in Mercer County, Illinois and about two months later, on April 11th, 1847 they departed for Oregon. He was 34 and she was 20 years of age.

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Crossed the Planes in 1847
Sugartree Grove, Mercer County, Illinois

James M. and Nancy Coon Started to go to Oregon April 11th - 1847.

Sunday April 11th, 1847
Got to Oquawka. a calf gave out.
Weather pleasant.

Mon. Apr 12th
Went to Henry Creek. (?????) all night.
Pleasant.

Tue. Apr 13th
Went to James Dill's by 11 o'clock.
Pleasant.

Note: James S. Dill and his family must have accompanied this wagon train and completed the trip to Oregon as his name appears on a BLM claim map as the holder of Oregon City Land Office Claim # 44, Not. # 2257 for 639.40 acres in Twp 13S, R4W, Willamette Meridian, sec.'s 17, 18, 19, and 20 - close to the present location of Peoria, Linn Co., Oregon. This location is within a mile or two of the claims held by James M. Coon, Jacob L. Coon, and John Miller, Jr. and Sr.

Wed. Apr 14th
Left J. Dills.
Rain.

Thu. Apr 15th
In Carthage all night.
Lite Rain.

Fri Apr 16th

Cold night.
Lite Rain

Sat Apr 17th
Came through Fairfield.
Weather pleasant.

Sun Apr 18th
Sunday. J. Dill turned his waggon over in corporation of Quincy. His wife got one foot outside time anuf to get it under the sideboard which held her there, til we collected our forces, loosed her and let her go, all right. In Quincy.
Cold rain.

Mon Apr 19th
Crossed the Mississippi River.
Pleasant.

Tue Apr 20th
Near Palmira.
Pleasant.

Wed Apr 21st
6 miles from Palmira.
Rane.

Thu Apr 22nd
6 miles to Clinton.
Cold rane.

Fri Apr 23rd
4 miles to Parris.
Pleasant.

Sat Apr 24th
In Madison.
Pleasant.

Sun Apr 25th
Sunday. 3 miles to Huntsville.
Pleasant.

Mon Apr 26th
Left Huntsville at twelve o'clock.
Pleasant. Made 11 miles.

Tue Apr 27th

Passed through Keyesville.
Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Note: This is probably Keytesville, MO. RPL

Wed Apr 28th

In Brunswick.
Hard Rain. Fourteen miles.

Note: Brunswick is on the Grand River near its confluence with the Missouri. To this point they have been following the drainage of the South fork of the Salt River which flows into the Mississippi near Palmyra. Much of Mark Twain's stories and life were involved in this area. (Mark Twain Lake is on the Salt River South Fork.) RPL

Thu Apr 29th

Crossed Grand River.
Pleasant. Thirteen miles.

Fri Apr 30th

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Sat May 1st

Cold and Cloudy. Fourteen miles.

Sun May 2nd

Sunday. Crossed Crooked River.
Pleasant. Sixteen miles.

Mon May 3rd

Passed through Richmond and Elkhorn.
Pleasant. Twelve miles.

Tue May 4th

Pleasant. Twelve miles.

Wed May 5th

Crossed through Plattsburg.
Pleasant. Thirteen miles.

Thu May 6th

Crossed the Little Platte River.
Rain. Sixteen miles.

Fri May 7th

At Saint Jo.
Pleasant. Twelve miles.

Sat May 8th
Lost one of our Oxen. Pleasant.

Sun May 9th
Sunday. Pleasant.

Mon May 10th
Found our Ox. Rain.

Tue May 11th
Crossed the Missouri River.
Rain. Two miles.

Wed May 12th
Finished getting our train acrossed the river.
Pleasant.

Thu May 13th
Camped on a little ravine called Indian Creek.
Pleasant. Five miles.

Note: This is probably Squaw Creek near the present Falls City on the Big Nemaha River in the south east corner of Nebraska in the vicinity of the Iowa SAC and FOX Indian Reservation. Many of the westbound wagon trains followed the north fork of the Big Nemaha to near it's headwaters, cut over to the Big Blue, and followed it's west fork to near Grand Island, Nebraska and the Platte River. RPL

Fri May 14th
Still in camp. Pleasant.

Sat May 15th
Elected Whitcomb for our Captain.
Rain.

Sun May 16th
Sunday. Fifty four wagons in company.
Cold rain.

Mon May 17th
Camped on Meceto Creek. 83 wagons in camp.
Pleasant. Six miles.

Tue May 18th

Camped at the agency.
Pleasant. Ten miles.

Wed May 19th
Ninty eight wagons in company on the Nemahau.
Pleasant. Twenty miles.

Thu May 20th
One hundred four wagons in camp on the Nimahau.
Rainy.

Fri May 21st
One hundred fourteen wagons traveling together. Lost our Captain and are in camp on a branch of the Nimahau in four different places.
Twenty miles.

Sat May 22nd
Forty five wagons in this company. One company behind and one before, in camp on the Nimahau.
Pleasant. Twenty two miles.

Sun May 23rd
Sunday. Fifty wagons in camp on a branch of the Nimahau.
Pleasant. Twenty miles.

Mon May 24th
Still in camp. Cold rain.

Tue May 25th
Eighty nine wagons camped on Big Blue River.
Chilly. Eighteen miles.

Wed May 26th
Still in camp on Big Blue River with fifty wagons.

Thu May 27th
Crossed the Big Blue River and passed the forks of the road to Independence. In camp on a branch of Blue River.
Pleasant. Seventeen miles.

Fri May 28th
Met with an Independence Company of thirty seven wagons in camp on a small ravine to the left of the road.
Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Note: Wagon trains starting the journey from Independence, MO commonly went into Kansas and followed the Kansas, Big Blue, and/or Little Blue Rivers West and North-west to either Grand Island or Kearney Nebraska on the Platte River. The "Coon / Miller" train has cut across on a much more northerly track to this point. RPL.

Sat May 29th

Passed 5 companies after night on the Republic fork. Camped on prairie. No timber or water. Twenty five miles.

Sun May 30th

Sunday. Passed one company. Blue Earth River. Saw some Antelope. Cool. Twenty five miles.

Mon May 31st

Still on the same river. Left part of the company. Thirty four wagons in camp with us. Pleasant. Twenty miles.

Tue Jun 1st

Left the Blue Earth River at twelve o'clock. Camped on one of the branches. Saw some Indians (Pawnees). Grass short.

Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Wed Jun 2nd

Fifty one wagons in camp on Platte River. Cold rain. Twenty miles.

Note: Judging by their arrival on the Platte this date and at Grand Island Thursday, this river they have followed for the past 5 days must be the West fork of the Big Blue. RPL.

Thu Jun 3rd

At the head of Grand Island. Salty Country. Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Fri Jun 4th

Laid by. Two companies passed us, One of thirty three and one of eighteen wagons, and One came up within three or four hundred yards and camped near us. Church man from Washington County, Iowa came up, whom we left with a friend of his from the same place by the name of Scott, who died May 31 on Blue Earth River. We fished and hunted today, caught nothing, killed two jack rabbits, and measured the Platte River by wading it with a rope. Made it one and one quarter miles wide.

Sat Jun 5th

Twenty one wagons passed us. Five miles. Pleasant.

Sun Jun 6th

Forty three wagons passed us. Laid by.
Hard rain.

Mon Jun 7th

Passed three companies in the evening on a small ravine running into the Platt, it being too full to camp we had the good luck to pass One company of forty three wagons scattered for half a mile on each side of the road, one half of them were fast in the mud. The poor oxen had to pay the bill or bear the blame. They had two Roman Catholics in their company. They were stalking around among the men with their long robes on and their bibles under their arms praying to God to help them out. He didn't. We passed altogether ninety four wagons in the low bottom on the Platt, a great many fast in the mud. Three miles and camped on the prairie. Fifty one wagons in camp.
Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Tue Jun 8th

We have plenty of buffalo meat.
Pleasant. Sixteen miles.

Wed Jun 9th

Indians got inside of the guard. Shot at them 3 times. All right. Good camping so far.
Cool. Eighteen miles.

Thu Jun 10th

Traveled today.
Pleasant. Seventeen miles.

Fri Jun 11th

Within eight miles of a new crossing of the South fork of the Platte.
Fifteen miles. Pleasant.

Sat Jun 12th

Crossed Platte 25 miles from the mouth. Passed Captain Findley's company.
Warm. Ten miles.

Sun Jun 13th

Camped on a branch of the Platte branch.
Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Mon Jun 14th

Buried Turner's son, three years old. Left south fork of the Platt at 12 o'clock. Camped on the prairie eight miles from the river. Here we used buffalo chips for fire for the first time.
Cold. Seventeen miles.

Tue Jun 15th

Came five miles to Ash Hollow. Here we left 37 wagons. Came on the North Platte and camped.
Pleasant. Six miles.

Note: Ash Hollow State Historical Park is located on the North Platte River about 20 miles northwest of Ogallala, NB, near the town of Lewellen. RPL

Wed Jun 16th

Laid by. Pleasant.

Thu Jun 17th

Laid by. Pleasant.

Fri Jun 18th

Camped at Spring Creek and Sandy River.
Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Sat Jun 19th

In camp at Three Bluff Springs.
Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Sun Jun 20th

Camped within five miles of Chimney Rock. Nooned near the Solitary.
Pleasant. Sixteen miles.

Mon Jun 21st

Camped near Scotts Bluff.
Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Tue Jun 22nd

Nooned at a spring in the bluff. In camp on Horse Creek.
Pleasant. Twenty miles.

Note: Horse Creek is on the Nebraska/Wyoming border and is shown on present-day maps as the site of a significant Indian Treaty. RPL.

Wed Jun 23rd

Camped on Platte River. Got blacksmith tools from Findley's company.
Pleasant. Three miles.

Thu Jun 24th

Laid by. Set tires and shod some horses and oxen. 4 head cattle died.
Pleasant.

Fri Jun 25th

Wood and water and grass plenty, among the latter is some poison. 2 Oxen died.
Windy.

Sat Jun 26th

1 cow died.
Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Sun Jun 27th

Camped at a Sioux Indian town. Quite a trade was got up between the women and Squaws trading beads and other trinkets for bread and meat. At Fort Laramie the old Chief told us we had to pay him for passing through his country. The commander at the Post told us it was customary to give him something. He spread down his blanket and each man put on his pay, some flour, some meat, coffee, beans, peas, dried fruit, etc. He was well pleased.

Pleasant. Twelve miles.

Mon Jun 28th

Three oxen died. In camp at good springs in ravine. Three companies here. Nooned at warm springs.

Light rain. Eleven miles.

Note: Warm Springs are located near the North Platte River and the present Wyoming town of Guernsey. RPL.

Tue Jun 29th

Divided the Whitcomb company on Bitter Cottonwood Creek. In camp on Horseshoe Creek.

Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Wed Jun 30th

Camped on a large creek. Grass has been short from the other side of Fort Laramie.

Pleasant. Seventeen miles.

Thu July 1st

In camp on a small ravine.

Pleasant. Sixteen miles.

Fri Jul 2nd

In camp on a large creek. Wood, water and grass plenty.

Pleasant. Ten miles.

Sat Jul 3rd

In camp on Platte river. Met 2 Frenchmen from Fort Hall.

Very high wind. Light rain.

Sun Jul 4th

Laid by. Saw eight men from Oregon.

Mon Jul 5th

Plenty wood, water, and grass.

Light rain. Eight miles.

Tue Jul 6th

In camp on the Platte.

Wed Jul 7th

Camped at the crossing. Plenty of wood, grass and water. Nine wagons in camp.
Pleasant. Ten miles.

Thu Jul 8th

At Blue Springs. Crossed Platt. Ninety wagons here. Good company.
Twelve miles.

Fri Jul 9th

At Soap Springs six miles from Willow Spring. Passed Poison Springs at noon.
Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Sat Jul 10th

Nooned at Rock Independence. In camp on the Sweet Water. Saw snow at Horse or Crooked
Creek.

Pleasant. Twenty miles.

Sun Jul 11th

On Sweetwater 2 miles from Devil's Gate. Stopped part of the day. Good camping.
Weather Pleasant. Ten miles.

Mon Jul 12th

On the Sweetwater. Broken sandy roads or country. Cold day and nights colder.
Fifteen miles.

Tue Jul 13th

Camped on the North side of the Sweetwater. Came a short cutoff.
Good camp. Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Wed Jul 14th

On Sweetwater. Camped with a company going to the states, with fourteen men in it.
Good camping. Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Thu Jul 15th

Camped on a ravine on the north side of the Sweetwater. Met Captain William Findley going to
the States.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Fri Jul 16th

Nooned at the head of the Sweetwater. In camp at the Pacific Spring.

Pleasant. Twenty five miles.

Sat Jul 17th

On Little Sandy.

Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Note: The Little and Big Sandy Rivers are tributaries of the Green River which flows into the Colorado to the south in Utah. Our travelers are now west of the Continental Divide, and in a few more miles will be traveling valleys of rivers which flow to the Columbia River and Pacific Ocean. The Bear and Port Neuf rivers are tributaries of the Snake. RPL

Sun Jul 18th

On Big Sandy.

Pleasant. Six miles.

Mon Jul 19th

Left Big Sandy at 3 o'clock p.m. and travelled all night.

Note: Between the Big Sandy and Bear Rivers is a large alkali desert with essentially no water. Travelling at night would have reduced the animals need for water. To circum-navigate this desert following a trail with adequate water would take several days. RPL

Tue Jul 20th

Came to Green River at twelve o'clock, crossed and camped on the bank. We traveled twenty seven hours.

Pleasant. Forty five miles.

Wed Jul 21st

Camped on a creek five miles from the crossing of the Green River.

Thu Jul 22nd

On a small ravine. Good camping.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Fri Jul 23rd

Camped at a spring at the top of mountains, 5 miles west of the fork of Bear River.

Pleasant. Thirteen miles.

Sat Jul 24th

On Bear River.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Sun Jul 25th

On Bear River.

Pleasant. Six miles.

Mon Jul 26th

On Port Neuf River. Good camping.
Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Note: Bear River flows into the Port Neuf near the present town of Montpelier, Idaho. RPL

Tue Jul 27th

At Good springs.
Pleasant. Twenty miles.

Wed Jul 28th

Nooned at Soda Springs. Camped at Soda Pool. Seven miles further on.
Pleasant. Seventeen miles.

Thu Jul 29th

On Port Neuf River.
Sixteen miles.

Fri Jul 30th

On a ravine running west.
Good camp. Sixteen miles.

Sat Jul 31st

On Snake River near Fort Hall.
Eighteen miles.

Note: Old Fort Hall was located near the present town of Pocatello, Idaho. RPL

Sun Aug 1st

Nooned at Fort Hall. Camped on Port Neuf River.
Twelve miles.

Mon Aug 2nd

American Falls on the Snake River.
Fourteen miles.

Tue Aug 3rd

On Fall Creek. Good camping.
Twelve miles.

Wed Aug 4th

On Raft River. Good camp.
Eight miles.

Note: Raft River is just down stream on the Snake from Massacre Rocks where a major Indian

engagement with a wagon train occurred a few years later than this trip. RPL

Thu Aug 5th

On Swamp Creek. Fifteen miles.

Fri Aug 6th

Nooned on Snake River twelve miles from Swamp Creek which is four miles from the river.

Camped on Goose River.

Sixteen Miles. Weather still Pleasant.

Sat Aug 7th

On Dry branch, water in pools. Good camping. From Goose River to Snake River is nine miles, then thirteen miles to this branch.

Twenty two miles.

Note: Present day maps refer to this as Goose Creek. RPL

Sun Aug 8th

On Rock Creek. Good water but no grass at the crossing.

Pleasant. Ten miles.

Mon Aug 9th

After leaving Rock Creek, good country for seven miles.

Pleasant. Seven miles.

Tue Aug 10th

On a small ravine, poor camping.

Pleasant. Twenty miles.

Wed Aug 11th

On Salmon Creek. Good camping. Four miles after coming down the bluff.

Pleasant. Two miles.

Note: Flows into the Snake near present-day Buhl and Wendell, Idaho. RPL

Thu Aug 12th, Fri Aug 13th.

Left the Salmon Falls at 5 P.M. Stranded until two o'clock in the morning. Started at five and traveled till seven in the evening Saturday. We then left our wagons two miles from the river and drove our cattle to it. Some were nearly drowned.

Sat Aug 14th

This morning brought the outfit down to the first crossing of Snake River forty miles from Salmon Falls.

Pleasant. Forty miles.

Note: Judging by distance and time from Fort Hall, and the terrain, this crossing was very

probably in the vicinity of present day Glenn's Ferry, Idaho. RPL.

Sun Aug 15th

Camped at ford. Pleasant.

Mon Aug 16th

Left the ford to make road down south side of river.

Pleasant. Six miles.

Tue Aug 17th

Worked road grading around a point on the river. Twenty seven hands worked.

Pleasant.

Wed Aug 18th

Illness of Julian Miller held up the train.

Pleasant.

Thu Aug 19th

Did not break camp. Pleasant.

Fri Aug 20th

Made the river. Good camping.

Seven miles.

Sat Aug 21st

Ten miles from the river. Good camping for five miles. At this point the road leaves the river.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Sun Aug 22nd

Five miles to Indian River. Eight miles further to Snake River. Good camping at both sites.

Pleasant. Thirteen miles.

Mon Aug 23rd

Ten miles to the river. Camping poor. Grass and Wood scarce.

Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Tue Aug 24th

Seven miles to a creek with little grass. Two miles to the river. No grass. Six miles to a creek.

Grass on the river for one mile down the creek, but little.

Pleasant. Sixteen miles.

Wed Aug 25th

Good camping.

Pleasant. Sixteen miles.

Thu Aug 26th

On the river or bluff all day. Good camping along the grass on the island. We passed two hot springs today becoming suddenly aware of the "HOT" when we laid down to drink.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Fri Aug 27th

Traveled along the river for seven miles, then left it to return again after eight miles march. Good camping on down the river.

Pleasant. Twenty miles.

Sat Aug 28th

Followed the course of the river all day. Good camping throughout the day's journey, with grass on the islands.

Pleasant. Thirteen miles.

Sun Aug 29th

Reached the Owyhee river today at twelve o'clock. Good camping.

Pleasant. Eight miles.

Mon Aug 30th

2 miles to the old road that comes from Fort Boise. John Miller's wife died today at three o'clock. Camped at the ford of the Malheur River. Good camping. We stuck our fingers into a hot spring we discovered here.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Tue Aug 31st

Wed Sep 1st

Buried Louisa Miller at eleven o'clock and left the ford. Let me explain here that we buried Louisa in the road and the wagon train drove over her grave in an effort to conceal it from the prying eyes of the Indians.

Pleasant. Eight miles.

Note: Information found in the records of Abraham Miller indicate this lady to be the wife of Abraham's brother John Miller. Louisa and John would have been Nancy's Aunt and Uncle RPL.

Thu Sep 2nd

Traveled fifteen miles to a little creek where we found grass. Camped on the Snake River three miles further on.

Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Note: This would have been in the vicinity of Farewell Bend. RPL

Fri Sep 3rd

Drove five miles to Burnt River, and followed it for nine miles. Leaving the river we traveled four miles and returned to it and found good camping along its banks.

Pleasant. Eighteen miles.

Sat Sep 4th

Came four miles. Left the river and went up Burch Creek four miles. Left Burch Creek and came three miles to Willow Creek. Then traveled two miles to Burnt River up which we traveled two miles. Good camping every few miles.

Pleasant. (???) miles.

Sun Sep 5th

Sunday. On the Burnt River and came up the north side two miles, then left it for three miles and came on it again after five miles traveled. Leaving it we traveled two miles and came on it again and traversed another three miles along the Burnt River road which is pretty rough. Camped this evening at the head of the North Branch. Good camping.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Mon Sep 6th

Came into the Powder River Valley traveling thirteen miles without water. This branch of the Powder River was dry with water in pools along the river bed. Came down the valley about two miles.

Windy. Fifteen miles.

Tue Sep 7th

Came nine miles to Powder River, four miles to crossing, two miles to a creek and camped. John Miller's child died today. Good Camp.

Pleasant. Twelve miles.

Note: Information found elsewhere in the records of Abraham Miller show this John Miller to be Nancy (Miller) Coon's Uncle who came to Oregon bringing two more children, settled on a DLC in Benton County, raised the other children, and no records indicate that he ever re-married.
RPL

Wed Sep 8th

Encamped at the foot of the hill after coming into Grande Ronde. Plenty grass, wood, and water.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Thu Sep 9th

At the foot of the hill in Grande Ronde this evening. There are a good many Indians here with ponies to trade or sell. Good camp.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Fri Sep 10th

This evening we camped on the Grand Ronde River at the foot of the Blue Mountains. The grass is short.

Pleasant. Eight miles.

Sat Sep 11th

On Still branch camped one mile from the brink of the hill. It is one mile down to the river.
Pleasant. Twelve miles.

Sun Sep 12th

Came eight miles to a creek, Louis Camp, and from there came two miles and made camp. Good camping.

Rain. Ten miles.

Mon Sep 13th

Cold and chilly. Came fifteen miles to the Umatilla River. Came two miles down it and succeeded in getting peas and potatoes from the Indians living there.

Rain. Seventeen miles.

Tue Sep 14th

Left Umatilla after coming down it eight miles. Went on nine miles and left the road.

Cold. Eighteen miles.

Wed Sep 15th

Today we came to the river and followed it eight miles, then crossed it and went on nine miles to a good camp.

Pleasant. Fifteen miles.

Thu Sep 16th

Lost some oxen and hired the Indians to hunt them. The oxen were soon returned and the Indians paid with a shirt.

Pleasant.

Fri Sep 17th

Left the Umatilla River and journeyed to the Columbia. Sandy road with no grass.

Warm. Fifteen miles.

Sat Sep 18th

Left the river after coming down it four miles. Came seven miles and left the road, went one mile to the river and camped. Grass and wood are scarce. I lost two of my oxen, Jack and Jerry. A few Indians standing around offered to hunt them down for two shirts but I hunted for them until I got so tired hunting I could go no further. Then I accepted their offer, whereupon they mounted their ponies. Presently they returned with the oxen and I finished the bargain by giving them two shirts. We have been traveling in a company of twenty five wagons. Since coming to the Columbia River I have learned that smaller companies have been robbed by the Indians.

Hot. Eleven miles.

Sun Sep 19th

Traveled along the river all day. Grass and wood are scarce.

Pleasant. Ten miles.

Mon Sep 20th

Remained close to the river all day. We are camped on Willow Creek. Good camping.
Pleasant. Thirteen miles.

Tue Sep 21st

Came twelve miles to dry hollow. Went two miles to the river for water. Camped one mile up on the bluff with no wood nor water but much grass.

Pleasant. Thirteen miles.

Wed Sep 22nd

Came eight miles to Rock Creek then down it five miles to camp. Good camping.

Pleasant. Thirteen miles.

Thu Sep 23rd

Came one mile down Rock Creek to the John Day River, one mile farther down we crossed and went up a big hill, traveling on fifteen miles to a dry branch. We came up the branch and camped at a spring three miles from the mouth. There is no wood here.

Pleasant. Nineteen miles.

Fri Sep 24th

Came three miles to a pool of water. I got breakfast. Then we pushed on to where the road leaves the branch. One mile beyond this is good camping. We camped where there was no wood nor water. There was good grass.

Cool. Ten miles.

Sat Sep 25th

A good many of the emigrants were sick from the exposure and hardship of the journey. We descended a steep hill and came upon the Deschutes River.

Pleasant. Twelve miles.

Sun Sep 26th

Made a boat of our wagons and stretched a rope across the river and passed it back and forth by the ripe (?). As the old saying is, a heap of hands make light work. We took our wagons to pieces and at dark had them all across in one big pile on the (????). A hard place to camp.

Mon Sep 27th

We were all day swimming our cattle across. Two or three were killed and three or four crippled. It's a very rocky ford and the water runs very rapidly. We had a good time getting our herds together on the rocks of the hillside.

Tue Sep 28th

Came up a very long, steep and rocky hill. Came eight miles to the west fork of the river. Good camping.

Wed Sep 29th

Came three miles and crossed the river. Came two miles, crossed a creek and came five miles to another creek. Crossed it and camped.

Ten miles. Weather hot.

Thu Sep 30th

Came four miles to Barlow's Gate and paid five dollars toll to cross the Cascade Mountains. We came eight miles to a creek. No grass. Lost a cow at this camp. (From description, A. Piburn got her)

Twelve miles. Pleasant.

Fri Oct 1st

Camped alone on a small branch. Grass off to the right.

Eleven miles. Pleasant.

Sat Oct 2nd

We were alone and upset our wagon today. No grass.

Eight miles. Rain.

Sun Oct 3rd

At the summit of the mountains. We packed our plunder all up the hill. It stunk with dead cattle. Here we lost five oxen. I buried an anvil and some log chains to the left of the road at the foot of the summit. Camped in a small prairie. Little grass.

Six miles. Cloudy.

Mon Oct 4th

At the foot of Laurel Hill, a poor camp with no grass. We cut down maple for browse.

Ten miles. Rain.

Tue Oct 5th

In camp on the Zigzag after crossing it four times. No grass.

Ten miles. Rain.

Wed Oct 6th

In camp at the fifth crossing. Little grass.

Five miles. Pleasant.

Thu Oct 7th

In camp at the top of a hill after crossing Sandy. No grass. We cut young maple for our cattle to browse on.

Seven miles. Pleasant.

Fri Oct 8th

In camp half a mile after crossing the Big Sandy. No grass, maple browse again.

Seven miles. Pleasant.

Sat Oct 9th

In camp on a small ravine. Little grass. We upset our wagon again today in a big mudhole where the road made a turn around the end of a log. We spilled all we had, even our sack of gold and silver in all amounting to five dollars. All said, we had a muddy fingering getting it all together again.

Six miles. Cloudy.

Sun Oct 10th

Came two miles to the FIRST HOUSE IN OREGON!!! To the second house three miles. Some grass. Here we camped.

Five miles. Pleasant.

I am thankful, for the Lord has been merciful.

Whole distance traveled from St. Joe on the Missouri River to the Willamette Valley, one thousand seven hundred and eighty nine miles.

Days traveled on the road, one hundred forty one.

Days laid by or didn't travel, twenty two.

James Madison and Nancy Iness (Miller) Coon.

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The following additional information was provided by James M. Coon, Jr. in his interview with Leslie Haskin:

My father and mother reached Foster's ranch at the end of the Barlow Pass on Sunday, October 10th, 1847. Thus far it is told in the diary. After reaching the Foster ranch, they spent a few days there to rest their teams. They then went on to the Pudding River where they passed their first winter.

Their first child was born in the winter of 1847. He died at the same place in 1848. In the spring of 1848, father came to Linn County and took up his donation land claim near Peoria where he spent the remainder of his life. In all, father and mother were the parents of fourteen children.

APPENDIX:

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Notes taken from Coon and Miller family history records
in the possession of Robert Lewis

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To provide the reader with a more concise and complete story, the following notes are appended here to give further insight into the activities of these pioneer families:

Several of James Madison Coon's brothers and many members of the Miller family travelled the trail to Oregon at various times. Family records indicate that apparently Rev. Jacob L. Coon, the third of the seven brothers, had gone some two years earlier, in 1845, and probably sent stories home about "This wonderful land called OREGON" enticing other family members to join him in the trek west.

I: George Kelly Coon: Born 7 Jun 1805 in Natural Bridge, Rockbridge Co., Virginia. Married Catherine Morgan 21 Aug 1839 in Ohio. Other family records show the marriage took place in Missouri. Started to Oregon in 1850. Stopped in western Missouri for thirteen years. Went on to Oregon in 1863 and died in Marion County, Oregon 11 Mar. 1896.

II: James Madison Coon: The subject of this composition, born 24 Sept., 1813 in Jefferson Co., Kentucky. To Oregon in 1847, and died at Peoria, Linn Co., Oregon 30 May 1890. He was buried in the Coon/Miller Cemetary at Peoria.

III: Rev. Jacob L. Coon: Born 3 Oct 1819 near Louisville in Jefferson Co., Kentucky. Public records indicate that he was the first of the family to go to Oregon. His obituary, published in the February 24th, 1904 issue of the "Albany Democrat" newspaper states that he arrived in Oregon in 1845 when he would have been age 26 years. He married Sarah Miller, sister of Nancy Iness, Born 6 May 1824 in Montgomery County, Indiana, on 27 Nov, 1851 at Peoria Precinct, Linn County, Oregon. Their Donation Land Claim - #661 for 640.00 acres in Twp 13S, R4W Willamette Meridian, Linn County, Oregon, adjoined his father-in-law's - #660 and that of his brother, James Madison Coon, near the present towns of Shedd and Peoria.

IV: Washington Landis Coon: Born 10 Mar 1825 near Louisville in Jefferson Co., Kentucky. Went to Missouri and then to Oregon in 1850. Returned east via South America in 1864 and then later returned to Oregon again. Is listed as a minor child in custody papers in his fathers estate in 1839 signed by George Kelly Coon.

V: Mary Jane Coon: Married as his second wife Nicholas Miller, brother of Nancy Iness (Miller) Coon on 25 Oct. 1849 in Rock Island County, Illinois. Nicholas was born 15 Jan 1816 in Wayne County, Indiana and died 16 Apr 1889 in Linn County, Oregon. He is listed as the holder of Oregon City DLC (Donation Land Claim) nr. 654 in Linn County, Oregon. No known dates or information about when this couple came west but presumed to be about 1850 to 1852. Mary does not appear on her father's estate papers as a dependent minor. She may have been older than most of the other children.

VI: L.E.V. (Lincoln) Coon: Family records show his children living in Idaho near the turn of the century.

VII: William Abner Coon: No records.

VIII: Charles Harrison Coon: No known dates. He is listed in 1839 as a minor child in the custody papers signed by his older brother, George Kelly Coon, found among his father Michael's estate records in Warren Co., Illinois.

Other family records indicate that most if not all of Nancy (Miller) Coon's parents and siblings were among the members of this wagon train. Note the Burial of Louisa Miller, the wife of John Miller, probably a brother of Abraham Miller., on September 1st. and the death of "John Miller's child" on September 7th, near the Powder River in eastern Oregon.

Oregon land records show that John Miller, Sr's "DLC" - Donation Land Claim (Oregon City DLC # 660) - Jacob Landis Coon's (Oregon City DLC #661), that of James Madison Coon (Oregon City DLC # 329 645.8 Acres TWP 13S R4W Sec. 4,5,8,9), and Nicholas and Mary Jane (Coon) Miller's (Oregon City DLC # 654 TWP 13S R4W Sec. 23) adjoined each other near Peoria in Linn County, Oregon.

Nancy's family is known to have consisted of at least the following family members. There may have been others (I have heard thirteen in all), but they are unknown to the compiler at this time:

Father: John Miller Sr. Born 15 Dec. 1792 in Carter County, Tennessee, lived in Millersburg, Mercer Co, Illinois prior to the 1847 trip to Oregon. Family tradition claims that these people founded both towns of Millersburg, Illinois and Millersburg, Oregon.

Mother: Sarah Smith. Born 9 July 1790 and Died 27 July 1853 in Linn Co., Oregon. She is buried in the Coon/Miller Cemetary at Peoria, Linn Co., Oregon but there are no dates or places listed on her gravestone. No further known information.

I: Isaac Miller: Born 19 July 1813 in Carter Co., Tennessee. Married Mary Gingles 20 Oct., 1842 in Mercer Co., Illinois, and died 19 June 1893 in Linn County, Oregon, and is buried in the Coon/Miller Cemetary, Peoria, Linn County, Oregon. He would have been 34 years old during the 1847 trip to Oregon. Isaac and Mary held DLC # 3116 in Benton County, Oregon.

II: Nicholas Miller: Born 15 January 1816 in Wayne Co., Indiana. He was 31 years of age on the 1847 trip to Oregon. He died 16 Apr 1889 in Linn County, Oregon. Buried Pine Grove Cemetary, Shedd, Linn Co., Oregon. Married as his second wife Mary Jane Coon, sister of James Madison Coon 25 Oct. 1849 in Rock Island County, Illinois. No dates or information as to when this couple came west but assumed to be about 1850 to 1852 considering their marriage and DLC dates and locations. They are listed by the Oregon BLM as the holders of Donation Land Claim (Patent) # 654 in Twp 13S R4W Section 23, Linn County, Oregon.

III: Mary Miller: Born 18 July 1818 in Indiana. She married James King - no date or place known - Died 30 Aug. 1838 at the age of 20, probably in Illinois. No further information known at this writing.

IV: Susanna Miller: Born 20 January 1820 in Indiana. She married Noah King on 30 Sept., 1838. She married Wair Long some time in 1847. No known places for either marriage. She would have been 27 years old on the 1847 trip to Oregon and is known to have died in Oregon and probably is buried in the Coon/Miller Cemetary at Peoria, Linn Co., Oregon but no dates are known.

V: Elizabeth Miller: Born 27 December 1821 in Indiana. She married James F. Jones on 1 April, 1847 at Mercer Co., Illinois - just 10 days before the family departure to Oregon. She would have been 25 years old when the family came to Oregon in 1847. She and James are listed as the holders of DLC # 4730 in Linn Co., Oregon. The both died in Oregon but no known place or dates at this writing.

VI: Sarah Miller: Born 6 May 1824 in Montgomery County, Indiana. Was 23 years old when the family came to Oregon in 1847. Married Rev. Jacob L. Coon on 27 Nov, 1851 at Peoria Precinct, Linn County, Oregon. Their Donation Land Claim - #661 for 640.00 acres in Twp 13S, R4W Willamette Meridian, Linn County, Oregon, adjoined his father-in-law's - #660 and that of his brother, James Madison Coon, near the present towns of Shedd and Peoria.

VII: Nancy Iness Miller: Born 8 April 1826 in Indiana, married James Madison Coon February 21 1847 in Mercer County, Illinois. She died 7 April, 1907 near Halsey, Linn Co., Oregon. These people show in BLM records as the holders of Oregon City DLC # 50, Not. # 2563 for 640.00 acres in Twp 13S, R4W Willamette Meridian, Linn County, Oregon, near the present towns of Shedd and Peoria. Nancy was 21 years old at the time of the 1847 trip to Oregon.

VIII: John Miller, Jr.: Born 28 February 1828 in Montgomery Co., Indiana. Twin to Katherine Miller. He was 19 years old on the trip to Oregon. He was on the wagon train accompanying James and Nancy (Miller) Coon and we are told by James M. Coon, Jr.'s interview with Leslie Haskin that it was his child who died September 1st, and his wife Louisa who died September 7th "near the Powder River in eastern Oregon" as quoted from the diary. BLM records show him as the holder of Claim # 64, Not. #2538, 160.73 acres in Sec. 3, Twp 13S, R4W, Willamette Meridian, in Linn Co., Oregon near Shedd, adjoining his father's and James M. Coon's claims.

IX: Katherine Miller: Born 28 February 1828 in Montgomery Co., Indiana. Died 14 April, 1830 at the age of two years, Twin to John Miller, Jr. Since the family is known to still be in Indiana at the birth of each of the next four children, it is assumed that she died and was buried in Montgomery Co., Indiana.

X: George Washington Miller: Born 6 April 1830 in Montgomery Co, Indiana. Died 25 Oct., 1914 at Dayton, Golumbia Co., Washington He married Sarah Ping on the 25th of Oct., 1858 at Linn Co., Oregon, and married 2nd Mary J. Watkins - date and place not known. He appears on BLM records as the holder of DLC # 38, Not. #2238, 116.34 acres, and DLC # 65, 44.36 acres,

Twp 13S, R4W, Willamette Meridian, Linn County, Oregon. This claim crosses the Twp line into Twp 12S, R4W, sec.'s 33 and 34.

XI: Jacob L. Miller: Born 10 September, 1831 in Montgomery Co., Indiana. He would have been age 15 at the time of the trip to Oregon. He married Amanda Ella Dawson probably in Linn County, Oregon, and was known to be living in Dayton, Columbia Co., Washington in April of 1907 when Nancy (Miller) Coon died. BLM records show him holding DLC # 4758 in Linn Co., Oregon.

XII: Rachel Miller: Born 10 September 1831 in Montgomery Co., Indiana, twin to Jacob L. Miller. She died 4 Aug 1904 and is buried in the Union Point Cemetary at Banks, Washington County, Oregon. No marriage information is known at this writing.

XIII: Eliza Miller: Born 1 April 1834 in Indiana. She would have been 13 years old at the time of the Oregon trip, and must have either stayed in the east or returned there as the records show that she married Jezreel Vanator on 9 Mar, 1851 at Ft. Dearborn, Dearborn Co., Indiana. She was known to be living in Lakeview, Lake County, Oregon in April of 1907 when Nancy (Miller) Coon died. Eliza died in Lakeview and is buried in the IOOF Cemetary, Lakeview, Lake Co., Oregon - no known dates.

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A second Miller family line is represented in this story by a Samuel W. Miller, the son of Abraham Miller Jr. and Julia Ann (Morgan) Miller. Samuel was married on 29 Nov, 1868 in Linn County, Oregon to Sarah Caroline Coon, the daughter of James Madison and Nancy Iness (Miller) Coon, born 14 Mar, 1849 near Peoria, Linn County, Oregon. Samuel's mother, Julia Ann Morgan, was a sister of Catherine Morgan who married George Kelly Coon, the eldest brother of James Madison Coon, who came to Oregon from western Missouri in 1863 and settled "on Coon Mountain" near the town of Bellfountain in Benton County, Oregon.

Further research into the Miller Family shows that there were at least three John Millers among the travelers on this wagon train, and TWO more arrived in Oregon on other trains the same year.-

Although the diary claims to start at "Sugartree Grove, Illinois", research in the Miller family line indicates that the present-day name for the place in Illinois is "Millersburg" - thus the trip actually commences in Millersburg, Mercer County, Illinois and ends at Millersburg (a present day suburb of Albany), Linn County, Oregon. The Miller family research also indicates that the family were indeed "Millers" - having engaged in flour/grist mill operation at several locations in Indiana, later in Kewanee, Henry County, Illinois and both Millersburgs as well as prior to their immigration to America from Germany (indications are that in Germany, the family name was Mueller - derived from their trade). Ship's passage records for the progenitor immigrant of this Miller line show the spelling Muller where the "u" is an "umlaut" with the dots over the "u". The German heritage of both the Miller and Coon families offers a ready explanation for their group movements together - Virginia to Kentucky and Ohio to Indiana to Illinois and later to Oregon.

In fact it is known that the Coons continued to speak German well into the third generation in the new world AND both families had roots in the Pfalz-Zweibruken area of the upper Rhine River Valley near the Allsais Loraine district.

The WPA interviewer, Leslie Haskin was unable to read certain areas of the original diary and as such, substituted question marks (?????) for the unreadable information. This practice is carried forward in this rendition.

Robert Lewis

Account of the Journey from Mercer County Illinois to Linn County Oregon, via the Oregon Trail, in Prose,

By Abraham Miller Jr.

This Journey took place in 1847, and he wrote this c.1849.
(presented to Nancy Ann Miller Weiss on October 4, 1885.)

Note: This transcription is from a booklet presented to his only daughter, Nancy Ann Miller Weiss, who reprinted it and gave copies to other family members. This copy is from a booklet in the possession of Lee Edward Blevins.

When in my native land I dwelt,
With friends for whom my Interest felt;
I burst through ties that bind the strong,
And turned my face towards Oregon.

'Twas thus I left my native home-
Through a wild desert land to roam;
And as my team moved slowly on,
My thoughts flew swift to Oregon.

And when we crossed the last state line,
Of well armed men we numbered nine;
Numbers increased the way along-
With young and old five thousand strong.

Whose snow white sheets all in a row,
With crooks and straights made quite a show-
Much like a swan, a passage bird:
(except the lowing of our herds).

Pleasant roads make joyful crew,
Who fancied pleasures always through;

We ate, and drank, and went our way,
Slept sound all night, and moved all day-

Except the sentinel on guard,
Whose fortune here was rather hard;
Just half the night one out of three:
Stand rain or shine was the decree.

The Buffalo looked with surprise-
Whose frightened herds outstripped our eyes-
The Antelope stamped as we gazed;
At such strange site all stood amazed.

Too soon, alas, all pleasure fled,
The wagon was the sick man's bed,
The wilderness our only home,
Where savage men, and wild beasts roam.

Our screaming wheels moved slowly round-
Where sedge and sands so much abound.
The beetle and the gadfly reigns-
Sole monarchs of the sandy plains.

But when we left the sand behind,
Our road with rock or dust was lined;
O'er rapid streams both deep and clear;
Our winding course we had to steer.

Volcanic piles on every hand,
Oft made me think of Sodom's land;
And wonder what unchristian race,
Had brought this region to disgrace?

Where none but reptiles dare to live;
Ad poisoned streams their venom give!
Of fallen man there was no trace-
God's vengeance had removed his race!

God's curse on everything we saw;
Hung like the Mede and Persian law;
The rain forsook the barren ground;
The mountains were turned upside-down.

The boiling springs with curling smoke,
A deep mysterious volume spoke;

Convincing all who stood around,
Of secret mysteries under ground.

When next we met the human race,
Adjacent to this dismal place;
The sight we saw caused all to blush;-
Their clothing was the willow brush.

The cascades blocked the road ahead;
Snow, hail, and rain, with mud to dread:
Fearing our teams could never pass;
We turned aside for better grass.

Columbia's stream we had in view;
It seemed only an avenue-
Through which at last we hoped to gain,
The Promised Land, the long sought plain.

It rained and stormed, and tost our boat,
O'er rocks and sand, and waves afloat:
At length on shallow sands we found,
Our floundering bark had run aground.

The one thing needful now to do:
Was pack ashore the frightened crew;
Kernaccas soon brought us ashore;
And set the boat afloat once more.

And down the stream our boatmen went,
In gaining land some time was spent,
I only thought of saving life;
My greatest care was a sick wife.

O'er brush and logs I had to pack,
Her feeble form upon my back-
While two sick children grasped my coat,
T'was thus at length we reached the boat.

It somewhat calmed and ceased to rain,
Our sick were fed, and dried again;
And with a light and buoyant heart;
All hands got ready for a start.

Soon down the stream with speed we flew,
With full spread sail and joyful crew;

Too soon alas! We danger saw,
The Cascade fall began to draw!

Just as we gave up all for lost,
A mighty wind the current crost,
And drove us to the destined shore-
In safety reached the land once more.

Among the rocks I pitched my tent,
And wandering up and down I went,
To seek some passage around the falls,
Five miles over rock the current rolls.

Three-quarters of a mile or more,
I lugged our package down the shore,
O'er rocky steeps and slippery ground,
The sick, the weak, I carried down.

As winds came howling through the rocks,
The rain increased its heavy drops;
The drenching torrents overhead,
Reached all on foot and all in bed.

Although we'd passed a fearful place,
Fresh dangers hedged our only pass!
The balance of the fearful way,
The angry waves dashed high their spray!

But when we got our all on board,
The tumbling waves like thunder roared;
Three hundred souls witnessed our start:
Dismay had seized the stoutest heart!

The old canoe was now to try,
Whether we live, or whether die!
Lord, in the storm shall we all lie,
Or on the waves our fortune try?

Thou saved us at the rapids head;
Now at the foot we are afraid:
To trust our lives to Thy strong hand,
As safe on water as on land?

Three daring flatheads seated low,
One in the stern, and two in the bow;

With deaf'ning shrieks they snatched the oar-
They waved farewell to all on shore.

Two minutes and a half we spent,
In passing every mile we went;
With speed and safety did we go,
And shipped aboard a boat below.

At length we reached our journey's end;
Our days in Oregon to spend;
With fertile soil and genial clime;
God grant that we redeem our time.

But when I ranged the wilds around,
Few native aborigines I found,
But ancient marks were everywhere,
Like Israel's tribes had once been there.

Thousands of piles of Moss green rock;
Still grace the rugged mountain's top;
To witness covenants unknown,
To us; lie these mysterious stone.

But mouldering bone, sad, sad to tell;
Where many thousands once did dwell;
We thoughtless tread their ashes down;
To cultivate the forest ground.

Who knows but our enlightened race;
In time, to others must give place?
The present age no prophets tell;
Who next upon this land shall dwell.

No antiquarian ever traced;
Mysteries of the ages past-
Mysterious world where none shall know;
What hidden mysteries time shall show.

Oh! slothful muse why fail to tell?
Of who once was, and yet shall dwell?
The past to present may give birth;
And yet, we're strangers in the earth?

Henceforth let us contented be;
With what we learn from what we see,

If more I learn perhaps I'll tell;
But for the present fare you well.