

The following is the transcribed version of the original diary written in 1852 by Henry Clay French.

This transcription has been a major undertaking, as the original pages are old and yellowed with age, the writing is poor and smudged. Every effort to read and interpret all the wording has been made, but has been found to be impossible in some areas. Therefore, in these areas, you will find that I have inserted a bracketed blank line {        }. If, after reading this, you feel that you can justly fill in the blanks please feel free to do so. This transcription also will not make any changes to spelling or punctuation. The only editorial liberty taken will be the placement of spaces at intervals that appear to be the sentences. Justification for this is easier reading.

The diary is was never finished, and there is a notation added to the end by Howard Blaine Picht, my grandfather. Henry Clay French was his grandfather. This notation will also be added for information to future generations.

I do hope you enjoy reading this as much as I have, and that you will treasure it for future generations to read.

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## Diary of Henry Clay French

March 3, 1852

On Wednesday evening about ten o'clock as I with my young friend J.V. Cotton were returning home we met with our friend James Duzan who accosted us with "O'ho I have found you at last Whats the matter whats wanted called out I inquiringly says he I am going to Oregon and I want you to go with me what say you I am willing if Cotton will go says I what say you Cotton I dont know about it says he but I will tell you tomorrow I want to sleep on it before I answer at this we parted agreeing to meet on the morrow each going his way I for my part retired to rest but hours passed before I was in the arms of Morphaeus the morrow came and I arose and soon was absorbed in reflection having but little to say to anyone I scarce dare look at any of the family for fear they would read my feeling and inquire them out this I was not anxious for them to do

I made my brother Isaac S. French acquainted with the new move and he bade me good luck by 10 o'clock Cotton was with me and Duzan soon arrived in sight and we mounted our horses and met him he was eager to be on his way we rode a few miles and returned agreeing to rig an ox team and go together to the far west appointing the 13th to start the next task was a hard one for I and Cotton to acquaint our parents with our desire I had been talking of going to the west and my mother said to me well Henry I want you to be a good boy when you get to Iowa and buy some land and settle yourself I replied I was not going to Iowa but to Oregon It was too much she with all the feeling of a fond mother implored me not to go it was the first time I had ever resolved to break even my parents wishes my father gave his council to remain with them and made offers of prosperity {how I was the one they had chosen to remain with them in their old age} but all was of no use my feeling was roused but I kept them back until I was alone when I gave way to my feeling in groans and tears the next day was busy in preparing to start bought a wagon and team was bought by Duzan Cotton was with me the most of the day the next day there was but little of interest the **7th** was the Sabbath we were all to the old Church known as the Eagle Creek Church after Church was out we with I.S. French went to John Duzans to dine {John Duzan is the father of James} James had two sisters who were intelligent young ladies they were full of jokes and cracked off not a few at the expense of the young bachelors that was going to Oregon where girls were so scarce all was received with the best of feelings for we were young bachelors yet none scarce twenty three all was life and good humor nothing worth noting transpired until the **11th** we put our team to the wagon to train as they were young and not well broke that night we remained at the house of John Duzan and was well entertained by the old folks as well as the young ladies who was full of life and sport as usual everything was now in readiness for the time of starting on the 14th I dined with J Duzan his uncles Dr P Duzan the grandmother of James gave us good advice and bade us to be good boys for which we thanked her that was the last advice that she will give to us in this life for she died on the 28th peace to her { }

**15th** I arose and prepared a final farewell I took breakfast with as much cheerfulness as possible but I had no appetite so I went through with the motion and was ready I parted with mother my younger brother and little Niece at once and they bade me adieu with tearful eyes my father and brother Isaac went with me to see me take a final start from John Duzans our team was soon ready and by ten o'clock we were ready to start there was a great number of friends come to see us start on our long journey I bade adieu to all { } the family of Duzans my father and brother last who severally pressed my hand and bade me good luck our team was now moving and a number of friends accompanied us they soon began to drop off until 12 noon we halted and took some refreshment none accompanied us farther except John Duzan all was in a sober mood we made nine miles travel and stopped for the night camped out and put our cattel in a lot the team consisted of one yoke of five year olds and two yoke of fours and a yoke of cows giving milk Such was our team

**16th** started by 7o'clock four miles to Lebanon this is the County seat of Boone County. there was a team started the same day that we did from the same neighborhood there was four young men with it viz James Bell Marion Paterson George and Samuel Hardens they were just in our

front a few miles we now took leave of John Duzan who was the last to leave us it was with a heavy heart that we now moved on having none to disturb our reflection I proceeded in front of our team to overtake the team in front which I did an hour by sun they were in good spirits for the occasion they returned with me a mile or two not meeting our wagon they returned to their own agreeing to wait until we overtook them on the morrow I proceeded back to our wagon which I met before camping they had started and had some difficulty in getting out of the mud but all was now right we camped after traveling fourteen miles

on the morning of the **17th** we arose the ground was white with snow and quite cold we moved on as soon as we were ready to overtake the company we designed traveling with three miles to Alisonville and one to the camp at Harden's team now we all traveled on together cracking jokes and telling stories to kill time the weather was cold and the ground freezing Crawfordsville eleven miles it is regularly laid out and well built on Sugarcreek a stream of about thirty yards wide affording good mill's we camped two miles after passed the city paid twenty five cts per bu for corn meal for our cattel

"Remarks of the Country" the country we have past over is generally level and muddy in the wet season of the year though very fertile and productive generally healthy though some ague and fever prevails in August and September throughout

it is past **18th** we moved on still cold and freezing eight miles to Mintown the population is about five hundred it is situated on a branch of Cole Creek which affords mill privileges to Hillsborough Seven miles it is situated on Cole Creek and has a population of about six hundred

**19th** We traveled to Covington 14 miles the weather cold and disagreeable but we were as lively as the nature of settling an enterprising population and bids fair to make one of the best countries in the State wheat corn hogs horses and cattel are grown to a large amount ease would admit we put up at the city hotel the wind was blowing so we could not ferry the Wabash River it was very high and we had to remain until the 20th

Covington is situated on the East Bank of the Wabash River and County Seat of Fountain County has a population of near 2500

it is a great place for slaughtering hogs from the surrounding country { } From Crawfordsville to Covington the land is generally good well timbered and watered uneven and hilly affording good { } stone from its numerous stone quarried

Cole Creek affords good mill privateges it is well timbered with oak hickory walnut ash and produces corn wheat oats rye grass and vegetables to great perfection considerable attention is paid to raising hogs and horses cattle is not so much looked to on account of the milk sickness which is very prevalent in the section of Cole Creek and it is a plague that causes the same to a blind man that it does to other there is no preventative and no one knows when they are most liable to be its victim this may be .....

{**20th**} we crossed the wabash river in a flatboat pulled by cows the wind was blowing quite hard but there was no accident happened we traveled on the plank road about three miles then traveled over a good prairie road the country was flat and weather wet we arrived at Danville at sundown a snowstorm was blowing at a great rate but we put up at an Inn and was quite comfortable there was two girls {nothing written.... marked with lines}

said of any where the evil is for we do not pass its bounds until we pass Danvill, Ill the Wabash is at Covington at the Inn that assisted the cooks with there advice I might say the cooks were myself and Marion Paterson to get supper and breakfast thanks to their dear little hearts and also to the Land Lady how her { } came I was informed of Col More of Danville preparing to immigrate to Oregon he was an early pioneer to that place and an acquaintance of my Father and a well known Citizen of the place he was to start in three days after we past

Rem,, at an ordinary stage of water is about one hundred yards wide and navigable from Steamboats the land is good immediately on the river but flat and wet after leaving it

until near Danville where it becomes hilly the land is barren and prairie it produces well if the season be favorable oftenwise the crop is cut short by rain or drought

Danville contains about two thousand inhabitants there is immense coal mines in the neighborhood of this place and it is used to considerable extent here for fuel Danville is situated on the Vermillion river about a half mile below its head it is favored by the junction of the north or East fork Middle fork and South or Salt fork named for its Saltworks I saw the Col,, but had no conversations with him.

**{21st}** we continued our journey half a mile we forded the north fork of the Vermillion River in about five miles and crossed the Middle fork on a bridge which we had to cross the wagons by hand and swim the cattle below we soon was on the prairie and made 11 miles this day camped in Walker's Point cold and chilly about six miles was laid out about the year 1824 by Daniel Beckworth who gave its name I had taken cold and was quite unwell the boys relieved me of camp duty and made me a good cup of Coffee on the

**{22nd}** we resumed our journey 14 miles to camp in a school house by permission the roads were rough and the weather cold Cranes and geese in great quantities

**{23rd}** 11 miles to Urbana C. S. Champaign Co., this place has about 15,000 inhabitants Six miles to prairie Camp the weather up to this time was very disagreeable but more moderate Rem,, Since leaving Danville we have traveled on prairie principally the last days we travelled until after dark the roads very muddy myself and Paterson driving we were tired and made some bitter complaints for having to drive so late but it was all over when we got to camp

here the land is fertile the general production is wheat and corn { } { } cattle are raised here horse's mules and hogs are also raised in great quantities there is not a great deal of energy used here they live rather indolent from appearance

the morning of the **{24th}** was very windy and disagreeable the day was pleasant Middletown is a town of { } name not more than 80 houses situated on the Sangamon River the road lay through almost entire prairie what timber there was consisted of mere whiteoak { } the Sangamon river is three or four yards in width at a low stage of water through rather a sluggish running stream

the prairie is not much settled though it produces well and will some day no doubt be a rich and highly cultivated tract not affording good mill but good sites for stream mills passed Mount Pleasant **{twenty-fifth}** Small village in D\_\_\_\_\_ County Camped in the open prairie spot some prairie hens they were very plenty the weather was very fine and quite agreeable for the time of year passed Feeney this is a pleasantly situated town at the edge of the timber and contains about a 1000 inhabitants

**{27th}** we passed through Bloomington this is the C.S. {County Seat} of McLane County this is a beautiful town of some 2500 inhabitants and regularly built on a beautiful of county as the county settles up with enterprising plan and can be seen for several miles and { } { } to be a large inland town the buildings are of brick and wood built in the most tasteful manner it has a most enterprising population **{28th}** this morning a company from the neighborhood of Pathfield, Ind overtook us and as we were acquainted with them we traveled together they were a company of Joneses we passed citizens which it is fast doing the County surrounding Bloomington is in a prosperous and thrifty situation and the envious world envy them their prosperity and happy situation Mackinaw a small village about a mile from Mackinaw River we camped on the river for the night crossed on a dangerous old bridge the river is about six rods wide and abounds with fish

**{29th}** we reach Pekin on the Ill. River this is a regularly built town of about 3000 pop we camped in the town and passed down to the ferry next morning early the remainder of the company camped at the ferry it was a house boat and had to go two miles down the river and three up a creek on account of the rise of water the boat could make but two days trips all day but two wagons at a trip the boat was ready when we arrived but one other

wagon was ready so were first to cross we crossed without any difficulty and camped one mile from where we left the boat and remained at camp until the 2nd of April

Passed several towns today Ringston population 700 Utica population 500 population of Monterey 300 Canton 1800 population this is a neat and flourishing town here I bought a rifle for the trip a good one for I wanted one that I could trust in any emergency I was detained some and did not overtake the wagons until after dark

{3rd} passed Centerville a small village passed {B } it is situated on Spoon River population 1000 this river is about ten rods wide swift we crossed on a bridge camped two miles after passing the town on an oak ridge

{4th} passed McComb C.S. of McDonald Co. rained all day camped three miles after passing the town the land is more hilly than any we had crossed generally white oak timber the prairie generally good the timbered land clay and not very productive considerable attention is paid to raising stock

{5th} this morning there is about six inches of snow the weather disagreeable George Shirts and George Jones are with us Mark A Duzan also with the families of the former we parted with Harden boys as they had to go by Quincy for to meet { } we made five miles with George Shirts and found good quarters with an old gentleman by the name of White he had three daughters and two sons grown all was life and gaiety we remained here until the 7th

{7th} we went on five miles to Childresses and hunted for deer the remainder of the day the evening was spent in good humor and sport

{8th} the snow mostly gone we started on and passed Carthage this is the place where the Mormon Prophet Joe Smith and his brother { } was murdered the building is of stone two storys high on a good view of golden point on the west were they saw there murderers gather and supposed it to be mormons Joe exclaimed I knew my good brethren would come to relieve me but alas his mistake for when he came to the door to meet his friends he meets his enemies who drink in his blood their fill and leave him melting in his grave and his people are scattered

put up at a tavern in the prairie and slept on beds of feathers but found ourselves very tired next morning being used to our own beds next day we passed through Warsaw and crossed the Mississippi River Camped three miles from the river the two last named towns are of about equal size population is about 2500 each the former is situated on the open prairie the latter on the bank of the Miss River

{rem} the land is rather thin and not very productive timber scarce but in the spring mud and water plenty game quite plenty

We are now in Missouri so I shall make { } and go as the state is not a very popular one in Oregon the first we found a clever man but he had moved into the state but a few weeks before we got through the state alive and thanks to our perseverance for it but we found another clever man that was old Clem Jones of Ind I had killed a deer and stopped to his barn for corn paid his price a ham of venison and got away from him I don't remember any more favors there was a Missouri boy on Blacklined Creek that offered us a turkey for three bits it would not weigh over 25 pounds so we told him he might eat his own game this creek is not much settled but it is the finest county that I have seen we took the old mormon trail and made good our way from St. Joseph on the Missouri River where we arrived April 23rd I will just say that Missouri like other states it has its faults and good qualities the part we passed through was generally good land though it wanted a supply of timber and sometimes it had too much standing water

the old morman trail is very plain they paid no attention to other roads but made their road as did the Israelites though the wilderness after arriving at St Jo we laid by until the

**1st of May** Hardens boys joined us at St Jo good meals started in with good spirits on the 30th of April myself with James Lee walked five miles up the river to another ferry we had a pleasant walk as we returned we passed a hill on the { } stretched our eyes to the west over the valley of the river which was thick timber too to the open land beyond the scene was a beautiful one but it brought to memory that the mormons would begin to lay this wild spanse between us and all we held dear certain the thought was a solemn one for neither of us was jovial on the occasion but talked of reality although our hearts was boyant with hope yet we were not right willing to give over those friends of our youth those that had formed the caractor and principals of our youth the parents of our home all the friends that bid us an affectionate adieu the uncertainty of our return was all in our minds we did not leave the lofty spot until the sun had set in the far west

we now hastened to the camp to inform the company of the opportunity to cross the river the next morning Mr J.P. Cotton was sick two days at St. Jo but was able to start on the first of May our provisions consisted of 200 lbs flour 1/2 lb beans 10 hand bread 5 lbs dried apples 150 lbs bacon 1/2 lb peaches 100 lb sugar 2 lb dried meal 15 lb coffee with a few

15 lb nice bushels of corn for our team we crossed the river on the **1st** of May and made six miles across the river bottom \*St. Joe has a population of about 3000 and is well built generally of brick with stone foundation the emigration camped around

St. Jo was estimated at from 6000 to 8000 we agreed to stand guard one at a time and half the night to head our cattel and keep on the lookout for any { } the Missouriia bottom here is covered with kick timber and a camp was made of rushes on which the Indians winter there horses there is several tribes about St Jo emergency we agreed to take our names in alphabetical form the first night packer stopped with us Cottons guard came first Duzan was second and the packer was to stand two hours in the morning the night passed well the morning dawned our { } was done for the morning and we started again and made 12 miles to camp crossed several level creeks the grass was young yet and not sufficient for our through way had no feed this night was mine to guard it passed as it generally does with young guards not without aprehended danger though there was no real danger is rained as it did for eighteen nights after we started on our journey

**{15th}** crossed Wolf River the emigrants came to a creek that was bad to cross they stopped a train to fix the road which they had done in a half an hour before they were in motion again the road was filled with the road often leaving the Missouriia bottom extended over a ridge land of fertile soil but littel timber it will likely be settled in a few years and bids fair to be a great commonwealth where now rages only the wild savage til his own state wagons for half a mile this made considerable delay Wolf River was bridged by the Indians for which they claimed fifty cts per wagon and three cts for loose stock which was generally paid without any trouble one man refused to pay and was about to drive his stock across when the Indian Chief sprang to his feet and uttered a piercing yell which brought about fifty indians to there feet to oppose the passage of the stock with strung \* with the wild beasts that seem to pass but littel attention to man as they have learned but littel fear from there Savage friends bows and fixed arrows when they were about to shoot into the herd the owner complied with there request which soon settled all dificulty three miles to the Iowa Mission from this is a fine piece of land under good cultivation there was a man dying with the smallpox when we passed we camped on a small stream four miles from the Mission no timber the land good a great many Indians 11th

**{18th}** to camp 14th without wood as there is a great scarcity of wood the prairie good farming land with good soil the 24th we passed the grave of John Bobs of Dayton Ohio Deceased May 24th and was buried in open prairie this brought many solemn reflections to our mind of the uncertainty of life this was the first new grave we had met since leaving the Missouri River 5th I am to camp plenty of wind wood and water

**{27th}** to littel { } Pincha passed Big Pincha here we found the bones of a man that the wolves had dug up and devowered this was enough we thought we wanted to be delivered from the wolves at least the land on the Pinchas is good

**{7th}** 18 miles to camp on a small creek in the prairie plenty of grass it rained very

hard

{8th} to camp in the prairie crossed Big Blue river here was a trading post and ferry we forded myself and Peterson waded and drove the teams put both teams to one wagon and and crossed then recrossed for the other wagon which we crossed in safety took in wood and water and camped on the open prairie soon a hand wagon or cart rather drawn by five men with their equipment for the trip this land good on Blue River with a littel timber

{9th} 10 miles to camp laid by half the day camped on a small creek its banks was limestone and Red Clay this clay the Indians use for painting

{10th} 18 miles camped to the right of the road about two miles { } often starting we passed where there had been eight or ten head of cattel killed a month or so before probably the work of Indians

{11th} 20 miles passed little Sandy Creek here there was a blacksmith shop too miles after crossing the creek we passed where an Indian was shot the night before attempting to stampede the horses of the train which he succeeded in doing but they were fortunate enough to recover them the Indian was found the next day by another train but a few rods from where he was shot

{12th} 20 miles

{13th} 17 miles camped on Little Blue grass scarce the moving Blue hard

{14th} 18 miles up the river camped on the river

{15th} 21 miles up the river this was a blue night the guards say they Duzan and Cotton the wind blew Hardens boys tent down many jokes were cracked at the expence of that night the next morning I relieved the guard at daylight and milked the cows and made by breakfast of new milk and pilot bread then called all out but some came in a grunting mood but none of them was hungry

{16th} 17 miles we drove on until noon and got dinner left the river and camped after crossing a small stream

{17th} 18 miles to the Platt river bottom road sunday two Indians Chiefs came to our camp and staid all night they were affraid to leave us after dark as there was camps all around us they were affraid of being shot by the guards that were there Sat I was called to talk with them after I agreed them leave to stay with us one of them called for tobacco he was furnished withit he then drew a hatchet made of stone from under his blanket and filled the pipe in the head of the hatchet and lighted it and handed it to me I smoked and returned it to to the indian that done the talking he smoked it with much gravity and handed it to the other who smoked and passed it to the other Boys each in turn then returned it to the Indian that acted as fore man he smoked and passed it to me we smoked for some minutes the Indian that acted as fore man raised up pointing to me Said Big Chief looks like our Big Chief {by this I got the name of Big Chief which I was called from this day **18th 1852**

**The hand written diary of Henry Clay French ends here with these additions made by his grandson, Howard Blaine Picht.**

Henry French was my Grandfather I don't know why he did not finish the diary but they continued on to Ore. stayed a few years and returned to the east by ship walking across the Isthmus of Panama as the canal was not dug yet. He later moved and settled in Iowa he

served in the Civel War as did 2 of his brother and one nephew. He raised a family of 4 boys and 4 girls he moved to Mo. about 1892 with his wife and youngest son and daughter makeing the move with 2 teams and covered wagons they seteled about 10 miles north of Bolliver Mo a little town called Cliquo was built on his farm. He died about 1900 and is buried near there.

{signed} Howard Picht

The young men reached Salem Oregon after traveling 6 months and 4 days Henry French remained there 2 years working as a teamster then returned to the east. Years later while attending a national reunion of the G.A.R. at Indianapolis he met 3 of the men who had made the trip with him to Oregon in 1852

**From here on in the diary are several blank pages. After that, there are a few pages which appear to have settlements of accounts on them. One of these accounts is a sixty dollar note to Isaac. Isaac French was a brother to Henry Clay French**



In the early 1990's, while researching her family history, Jolene Cecile Picht Dodge, Henry Clay French's great granddaughter desired to learn more of the history of these men. Jolene is in possession of the original diary, and this is what she found.

In searching the area of Boone County, Indiana, it was discovered that James Duzan had died in Oregon in 1852 and was buried on the Columbia River. He was twenty-two years of age. This information was located in a biography about John Duzan, his father.

About the brothers, George and Samuel Harden, the following information was gleaned. George was born in Holmes County, Ohio and Samuel was born in Hamilton County, Indiana.

George Harden married Mary Wageman in 1866 and continued to live in Hamilton County, Indiana. Samuel Harden married Eliza Swain in 1856 and resided in Anderson, Indiana.

Samuel became a writer for a local newspaper and the following article appeared in a Lebanon, Indiana Newspaper in May, 1887.

Dedicated to the boys who crossed the Plains with me in 1852  
By Samuel Harden

The following are the names of the company who left Eagle Village for California, March 15, 1852: Marion Patterson, James Duzan, George Harden, Henry French, James N. Lee, Isaac Cotton and Samuel Harden.

Comrades, it is growing late, tis camping time,  
Here let us rest on the banks of this stream;  
Yonder is a spring, and wood to light our fire by;  
Green pastures on every hand to rest our jaded team.

Yes, let us gather 'round the fire once again;  
For we must be nearing our journey's end;  
The plains are past, the mountains are in view,  
The slope beyond where sky and water blend.

How like life the overland journey seems  
The plains the morning, ere the noon begins;  
The mountains gained, snow-capped we find  
Morning past, the evening tide appears.

Comrades, our journey o'er the plains is nearly done,  
The golden shore lies just beyond;  
Our fire is burning low-another day begun;  
We may reach there ere night comes on.

Lebanon, May 1887

No information on the others has been found to date.