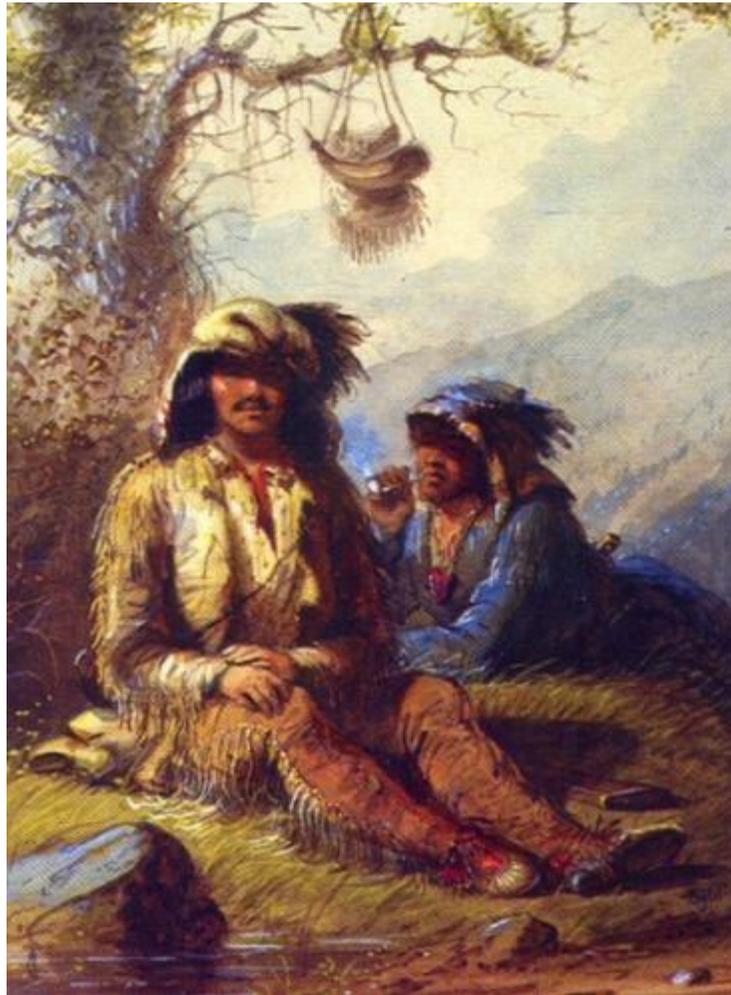


Moses “Black” Harris Pioneer

of 1822

compiled by Stephenie Flora
oregonpioneers.com



Two Trappers by Alfred Jacob Miller
[The one on the left is thought to be Moses “Black” Harris]

Moses Harris

b. c1800 Union Co, SC

d. 06 May 1849 near Independence, MO

m. Indian Woman Children:

reportedly several

The controversy about the color of Moses “Black” Harris rages on. All indications are that he was either white or possible bi-racial. The confusion seems to have come about because he was referred to as the “Black Squire” as well as numerous other names including Major Harris, although he seems to have not had any military background. Adding to the confusion is his dark skin which has been described as swarthy by some and black powder tinted by others. A fictional publication based on him added to the confusion by creating a main character called Black George.

In an article featured at the bottom of this page on the merits of buckskin, Jess Applegate states “As to coats, I presume our people realized, without trying the experiment, how, wretchedly disagreeable a buckskin coat would be where there was so much wet weather, for I remember seeing only one man wearing such a coat. He was a trapper from the mountains, known by us as “Black Harris,” for, tho a white man, his face was the color of his coat. He left the valley before the first shower commenced.”

His background previous to joining the American Fur Company is unknown and attempts to trace it have been unsuccessful.

Notes:

- 1) Two records for Moses Harris at the Oregon State archives appear to be unrelated to this Moses Harris
- 2) There was a ferry at Tualatin run by a Harris but was probably not associated with this Moses as it was still running under that name after Moses Black Harris’ death in MO and there were numerous Harris families in the valley by then.
- 3) In one citation by Rev. Cushing Eells, Moses was called a half-breed. Due to the darkness of his skin that may have been more of an assumption on Eells part rather than any real knowledge.
- 4) Moses appears to have been another one of the “well educated” trappers unless he was enlisting the aid of someone else to do his writing for him which seems unlikely for several reasons.

list of Harris Households in Union County, SC for 1800

!800: Union County, SC

HARRIS: slaves- total persons in household

David	0-7
James	0-9
John	0-7
Mack	0-4
Nicholas	1-10
Nicholas Jr	0-3
Richd	0-4
Robert	1-6
Ruhd	0-4
Saml	3-9
Saml	0-4
Sarah	2-7
Wm	0-2

“Harris, the mountain men agreed, was the darnedest liar; lies tumbled out of his mouth like boudins out of a buffler’s stomach. But he was also a `man of great leg’, exactly suited to such a journey as this.

His given name was Moses, and he was born, it is said, in Union County, South Carolina. He may first have gone to the mountains in 1822, and it is reasonably certain that he was one of the two men named Harris who in the fall of 1828 floated down the Missouri with John S. Fitzgerald. Beckwourth says he went to the Rockies a year later in Ashley's party. Harris looked and was tough; the painter Alfred Jacob Miller described him as 'of wiry form, made up of bone and muscle, with a face apparently composed of tan leather and whip cord, finished off with a peculiar blue-black tint, as if gunpowder had been burnt into his face'. He was a man of violent passions, but for all that, as Clyman once remarked, 'a free and easy kind of soul Especially with a Belly full'." [[Jedediah Smith And The Opening Of The West by Dale L. Morgan p.218]

1822:

"Andrew Henry and William H. Ashley (who had formed a fur trade partnership in the summer of 1821) outfitted a large company of young men (including Jedediah Smith, David E. Jackson, James Bridger, Mike Fink, Moses 'Black' Harris and John H. Weber) in March; obtained licenses to enter the Indian country; and in April (1822) started their expedition up the Missouri." [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.104]

1825:

"Jedediah Smith (William H. Ashley's new partner) led the company of about 60 Ashley-Smith men (with 160 horses and pack mules; an outfit worth \$20,000) which left St. Louis on November 1 for the Rocky Mountains. Making this trip were such experienced hands as Jim Beckwourth (who later told a partially fanciful version of this journey), Louis Vasquez, Moses 'Black' Harris..... a third of the mules died, and Smith sent Beckwourth and Black Harris to St. Louis for more....." [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.130]

"Chapter II: Being possessed with a strong desire to see the celebrated Rocky Mountains, and the great Western wilderness so much talked about, I engaged in General Ashley's Rocky Mountain Fur Company. The company consisted of twenty-nine men, who were employed by the Fur Company as hunters and trappers.

We started on the 11th of October with horses and pack-mules. Nothing of interest occurred until we approached the Kansas village, situate on the Kansas River, when we came to a halt and encamped.

Here it was found that the company was in need of horses, and General Ashley wished for two men to volunteer to proceed to the Republican Pawnees, distant three hundred miles, where he declared we could obtain a supply. There was in our party an old and experienced mountaineer, named Moses Harris, in whom the general reposed the strictest confidence for his knowledge of the country and his familiarity with Indian life. This Harris was reputed to be, a man of "great leg," * * i.e., a great traveler; able to go a great distance in a day and capable, from his long sojourning in the mountains, of enduring extreme privation and fatigue.

There seemed to be a great reluctance on the part of the men to undertake in such company so hazardous a journey (for it was now winter). It was also whispered in the camp that whoever gave out in an expedition with Harris received no succor from him, but was abandoned to his fate in the wilderness.

Our leader, seeing this general unwillingness, desired me to perform the journey with Harris. Being young, and feeling ambitious to distinguish myself in some important trust, I asked leave to have a word with Harris before I decided.

Harris being called, the following colloquy took place:

"Harris, I think of accompanying you on this trip." "Very well, Jim," he replied, scrutinizing me closely, "do you think you can stand it?"

"I don't know," I answered, but I am going to try. But I wish you to bear one thing in mind: if I should give out on the road, and you offer to leave me to perish, as you have the name of doing, if I have strength to raise and cock my rifle, I shall certainly bring you to a halt."

Harris looked me full in the eye while he replied, "Jim, you may precede me the entire way, and take

your own jog. If I direct the path, and give you the lead, it will be your own fault if you tire out."

"That satisfies me," I replied: "we will be off in the morning."

The following morning we prepared for departure. Each man loading himself with twenty-five pounds of provisions, besides a blanket, rifle, and ammunition each, we started on our journey. After a march of about thirty miles, I in advance, my companion bringing up the rear, Harris complained of fatigue. We halted, and Harris sat down, while I built a large, cheering fire, for the atmosphere was quite cold. We made coffee, and partook of a hearty supper, lightening our packs, as we supposed, for the following day. But while I was bringing in wood to build up the fire, I saw Harris seize his rifle in great haste, and the next moment bring down a fat turkey from a tree a few rods from the camp. Immediately reloading (for old mountaineers never suffer their guns to remain empty for one moment), while I was yet rebuilding the fire, crack went his rifle again, and down came a second turkey, so large and fat that he burst in striking the ground. We were thus secure for our next morning's meal. After we had refreshed ourselves with a hearty supper, my companion proposed that we should kill each a turkey to take with us for our next day's provision. This we both succeeded in doing, and then, having dressed the four turkeys, we folded ourselves in our blankets, and enjoyed a sound night's rest.

The following morning we breakfasted off the choicest portions of two of the turkeys, and abandoned the remainder to the wolves, who had been all night prowling round the camp for prey. We started forward as early as possible, and advanced that day about forty miles. My companion again complained of fatigue, and rested while I made a fire, procured water, and performed all the culinary work. The selected portions of last evening's turkeys, with the addition of bread and coffee, supplied us with supper and breakfast. After a travel of ten days we arrived at the Republican Pawnee villages, when what was our consternation and dismay to find the place entirely deserted! They had removed to their winter quarters. We were entirely out of provisions, having expected to find abundance at the lodges. We searched diligently for their *caches* (places where provisions are secured), but failed in discovering any. Our only alternative was to look for game, which, so near to an Indian settlement, we were satisfied must be scarce.....

"Chapter III: My companion and myself took counsel together how to proceed. Our determination was to make the best of our way to the Grand Ne-mah-haw River, one of the tributaries of the Missouri. We arrived at that river after nine days' travel, being, with the exception of a little coffee and sugar, entirely without provisions. My companion was worn out, and seemed almost disheartened. I was young, and did not feel much the worse for the journey, although I experienced a vehement craving for food. Arrived at the river, I left Harris by a good fire, and, taking my rifle, went in quest of game, not caring what kind I met.

As Fortune would have it, I came across an elk, and my rifle soon sent a leaden messenger after him. We encamped near him, promising ourselves a feast. He was exceedingly poor, however, and, hungry as we were, we made a very unsavory supper off his flesh. The next morning we continued our journey down the Ne-mah-haw, traveling on for five days after I had killed the elk without tasting food. The elk had been so rank that we carried no part of him with us, trusting to find some little game, in which we were disappointed. We had thrown away our blankets to relieve ourselves of every burden that would impede our progress, which, withal, was extremely slow.

On the fifth day we struck a large Indian trail, which bore evident marks of being fresh. My companion now gave entirely up, and threw himself to the ground, declaring he could go no farther. He pronounced our position to be thirty miles from the trading-post. I endeavored to arouse him to get up and proceed onward, but he could only advance a few rods at a time. I felt myself becoming weak; still, I had faith that I could reach Ely's, if I had no hinderance; if I lingered for Harris, I saw we should both inevitably perish. He positively declared he could advance not a step farther; he could scarcely put one foot before the other, and I saw he was becoming bewildered.

In the dilemma I said to him, "Harris, we must both perish if we stay here. If I make the best of my

way along this trail, I believe I can reach Ely's some time in the night" (for I was aware that the Indians, whose trail we were following, were proceeding thither with their peltry).

But Harris would not listen to it.

"Oh, Jim," he exclaimed, "don't leave me; don't leave me here to die! For God's sake, stay with me!" I did my best to encourage him to proceed; I assisted him to rise, and we again proceeded upon our journey.

I saw, by the progress we were making, we should never get on; so I told him, if I had to advance and leave him, to throw himself in the trail, and await my return on the following day with a good horse to carry him to the trading-post. We walked on, I a hundred yards in advance, but I became convinced that if I did not use my remaining strength in getting to Ely's, we should both be lost.

Accordingly, summoning all my forces, I doubled my speed, determined to reach the post before I stopped. I had not proceeded half a mile ere I heard the report of two rifles, and, looking in the direction of the sound, I saw two Indians approaching with demonstrations of friendship.

On reaching me, one of them exclaimed, "You are dead-you no live!"

I explained to him that I had left my companion behind, and that we were both nearly starved to death. On this they spoke a few words to each other in their own language, and one started off like a race-horse, along the trail, while the other returned with me to my companion.

As we approached him I could hear him moaning, "Ho, Jim! come back! Come back! don't leave me!" We went up to him, and I informed him that we were safe; that I had met the Indians, and we should soon be relieved.

After waiting about three hours, the rattling of hoofs was heard, and, looking up, we discovered a troop of Indians approaching at tall speed. In another moment they were by our side. They brought with them a portion of light food, consisting of corn-meal made into a kind of gruel, of which they would give us but a small spoonful at short intervals. When Harris was sufficiently restored to mount a horse with the assistance of the Indians, we all started forward for the post.

It appeared that the two Indians whom I had so fortunately encountered had lingered behind the main party to amuse themselves with target-shooting with their rifles. The one that started along the trail overtook the main body at a short distance, and, making our case known to them, induced them to return to our succor.

We encamped with them that night, and they continued the same regimen of small periodic doses of gruel. Several times a large Indian seized hold of an arm of each of us, and forced us into a run until our strength was utterly exhausted. Others of the party would then support us on each side, and urge us on till their own strength failed them. After this discipline, a spoonful or two of gruel would be administered to us. This exercise being repeated several times, they at length placed before us a large dish containing venison, bear-meat, and turkey, with the invitation to eat all we wanted. It is unnecessary to say that I partook of such a meal as I never remember to have eaten before or since.

Early the next day we arrived at the trading-post of Ely and Curtis, situate on the Missouri River, near the mouth of the Kansas. As I entered the house, I heard someone exclaim, "Here comes Jim Beckwourth and Black Harris," the name he went by where he was known.....

Chapter VIII To return to my narrative: Mr. Sublet, having left the camp in company with my old companion, Mr. Harris, before we returned, had left a letter of instructions for Fitzpatrick, desiring him to remove our camp as early in the spring as possible back to Cache Valley, and to repair to Weaver's Lake, where he would rejoin him. Sublet and Harris had parted for St. Louis, which they reached in safety after a journey in mid-winter.

Chapter IX: Our party continued trapping up the Port Neuf until we came to Sheep Mountain, which we passed without difficulty, the snow having by this time disappeared. We proceeded on to Bear River, and continued trapping upon that stream and its tributaries until we reached Sage River, where, very

unexpectedly, and to our utter surprise, we met "two white men," Black Harris and my old friend Portuleuse.

Chapter XX: A PARTY of nine trappers happening to call at the village on their way to the fort, among whom was my old friend Harris, I proposed to accompany them. We started, and reached the fort without accident, except sustaining another siege from the Black Feet. After our departure, the whole village followed to purchase their spring supply of necessaries at the fort. They brought an immense stock of peltry, with which they purchased every thing that they stood in need of." [The Life and Adventure of James P. Beckwourth]

“The search Jedediah launched for the river which flowed from Great Salt Lake to the sea apparently led directly to the first exploration of the lake by water. It has long been known that a party of four trappers paddled around the lake in the spring of 1826. It took them 24 days, and a very thirsty time they had of it before they reached the fresh-water springs at the south shore of the lake. On various occasions Jim Clyman, Louis Vasquez and Black Harris claimed to have floated around the lake, and the same claim was made for Henry G. Fraeb, so it may be that these were the four men who ‘coasted the lake’.” [Jedediah Smith And The Opening Of The West by Dale L. Morgan p.185 additional notes elaborating on the sources of this information p.410]

1827:

“Eastbound on a perilous, heart-of winter, 1500 mile journey overland to St. Louis (from a January 1 starting point in the Great Salt Lake valley), snowshoe-equipped William L. Sublette and Moses ‘Black’ Harris, with their Indian-trained pack dog--all three exhausted and starving—left the Platte near Grand Island and headed southeast towards the Kansas. In their extremity the men finally killed and ate the dog. Later they shot a rabbit; and after that, in a timbered area, brought down some wild turkeys. Meanwhile, they had found an old Kansa trail which eased their way through the deep, encrusted snow. They made their way to the Kansa village near the mouth of the Big Blue in the latter part of February. There they got food and aid. Sublette traded his pistol for a horse (to give Harris—who had sprained an ankle—transportation). They arrived in St. Louis March 4 to meet with William Ashley.” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.137]

“Wearing snowshoes, the two men set out from the valley of the Great Salt Lake on January 1, 1827...arriving in St. Louis on March 4, 1827” [Jedediah Smith And The Opening Of The West by Dale L. Morgan p.218-220 full story told of journey]

“(November) 23d (1827) My things were all ready to go on shore and I received an invitation to dine. The Company consisted of Capt. John Bradshaw of the Ship Franklin from Boston. Capt. Reuben Cresy of the Sophia from New Bedford, Capt. [John] Fo[r]ster of the Brig Tullum from Mexico, Capt Moses Harris of the Weymouth from Nantucket, Capt [Obad Swain] of the Enterprize from Nantucket, Capt [Benjamin A. Coleman] of the Eagle from Nantucket, and Mr. [Henry D.] Fitch, supercargo of the Brig Tullum. After dinner the wind arose so that I could not go on shore, so we remained and supped and contrary to my wish sat up untill 3 O Clock to drink wine, after which we took a little sleep.” [Journals of Jedediah S. Smith, Second Expedition to California 13 Jul 1827-13 Jul 1828]

"Outfitted by William H. Ashley, and the American Fur Company, a party of about 60 men, headed by James B. Bruffee and Hiram Scott, left St. Louis late in March for the trappers' summer rendezvous at Bear Lake William L. Sublette accompanied this expedition, which (it seems established) traveled 'Sublette's Trace' (pioneered in February by the eastbound Sublette and his companion 'Black' Harris. " [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.139]

From the New Orleans Picayune.

A PERILOUS WINTER JOURNEY.—On the 1st of January, 1827, Col. Wm. L. Sublette, of St. Louis, and Moses Harris, known all over the mountains as "Black Harris," started from the valley of the Big Salt Lake (Bonneventura) on an express to St. Louis, under contract with Gen. Ashley, then in the mountains; by which they were to obtain certain goods at certain prices, provided their order was given in St. Louis by the 1st of March. They started on foot with snow-shoes, as horses could neither travel through the snow or find provender on the way, and would, consequently, perish in a few days, while the only assistant they took with them was an Indian trained pack dog, whose fate has been mentioned in a former sketch. On the back of this poor animal they strapped some fifty pounds of sugar, coffee and other merchandize, and, fastening all the dried meat they could obtain upon their own backs, these two daring men commenced on foot, in the heart of winter, a journey of two thousand miles over a savage wilderness, white with snow.

They got as far upon their journey as "Harris Fork" without meeting with any indication of buffalo; but still making slow inroads upon their dried meat, which they husbanded with an economy that nothing but the awful idea of being overtaken by starvation in that desolate land could have induced. Continuing their journey, they became alarmed by near signs of the daring and desperate Blackfoot, compelling them to leave such shelter as their route afforded, and take to the open plains where they could get no water save what they obtained from snow or ice. Sometimes they were compelled to encamp where the snow lay packed in solid masses many feet above the ground, and their manner of building a fire in such places was to lay logs upon the snow and kindle the flaming element above them. Where the snow was not too deep they scraped it away and made their evening fire upon the ground. Then when done their supper and ready for sleep, they would remove the fire and lie down upon the warm spot.

In this manner they travelled for fourteen days, when they struck the sweetwater, and were fortunate enough to kill a cow. A feast was at once determined upon—a mountain custom for all such cases made and provided, and which is bound to take place at all hazards. So the dog was unpacked, and the sugar and coffee for the first time opened. The hump ribs were roasted, the little leather bag of salt lay between the two mountaineers, the coffee was simmering on the coals, ready cleared and sweetened, their knives were out, their eyes were glistening, their toes were toasting, their hearts were rejoicing, when Black Harris, in some unlucky manner, upset the coffee-pot! It was cruel! The two men did not swear or utter a syllable; but, taking one long, blank stare at each other, they fell to work silently upon their hump ribs; but neither Sublette or Harris has ever forgotten that circumstance, and they speak of it now with tears in their eyes.

The next day they reached Rock Independence. into one of the cavities of which they crawled and snugly passed the night. Their course now led them over snow drifts of great extent, sometimes compelling them to wear their snow-shoes for half a mile, and then the close-swept ground allowing them to proceed in moccasins for as much further. Travellers may have noticed that the *artanisia*, or wild sage, that covers this region to such an illimitable extent, grows far higher, thicker and more luxuriant in the hollows than in exposed places, and is ever found upon the sheltered side of a hill, while the other remains comparatively bare. This is caused by the operation of winter; the *artanisia* is nourished by the snow, and where the last falls deepest and stays longest, there this remarkable growth obtains its greatest luxuriance.

The two traders proceeded down the Platte to where they could find no more wood to comfort themselves at night while passing through dangerous neighborhoods, and here the first effects of their extraordinary and unprecedented march began to wear seriously upon their strength and spirits. In their weakened condition they were often compelled to walk half the night to keep themselves from freezing, until they could get into a hollow or some place to shelter them in a small measure from the cutting blast. Nearing Ash Creek they found recent traces of the cowardly and treacherous Pawnees, and the two poor travellers were compelled to turn four days' journey out of their way, to avoid meeting such dangerous enemies. They then struck a large Indian trail, which they followed in desperation, until it led them, luckily, to an encampment of friendly Mohawks, from whose chief, Big Elk, they received much kindness and friendly attention. They next reached a place called "Cold Camp Creek," and, resuming their journey from here, went on, meeting Indians now and then, from whom they received no molestation, but who were so poor in provision themselves that they could afford the white men nothing in the way of food. Sublette gave his knife, the greatest personal treasure that a mountaineer knows, for a dried buffalo tongue, which he and Harris immediately devoured between them.

But just after this their greatest misfortune yet occurred. They had not observed that the sack in which they packed their smaller bags of sugar, coffee, &c., on the dog's back, had for a long time been wearing threadbare, and one evening their poor canine servant came crawling into camp with the torn and empty sack dragging at its heels, everything having disappeared miles away behind! They were now left without a mouthful of anything. They travelled the next day, hungry and destitute, until evening, when Sublette shot a raven, on Grand Island, and they supped off that, without pepper, salt or coffee to assist in making it palatable. During the meal the old coffee-pot happened to fall in the way of Harris, and he gave it a kick that sent it half way across the river Platte, announcing emphatically his conviction that there would be on occasion to upset that any more! The poor dog was now starving, lingering far behind, and crawling into camp late at night, to sleep supperless with its unfortunate masters, until a few evenings after, when it was killed and eaten, as had been related.

The flesh of the dog served them but two days and still they kept on growing hourly weaker, here and there snobling at some lonely bird and missing it, and their way through the snow getting every day more desperate and difficult. At the Sandy Creeks they found the snow not firm enough to bear them, and they were obliged to beat it down, step by step, as they advanced. Here, however, they shot a rabbit, and this gave them a little strength to push on. They next struck a Kaw trail through the snow, about a month old, which they followed for some distance and here their troubles approached an end, for they got among the wild turkies, and soon killed enough to furnish them with sumptuous provender. A few days more brought them to the Old Kansas village, where they were well fed and furnished for their two days' further travel to the settlements.

They reached St. Louis on the 4th of March, just three days too late for the object of their enterprise, after all their hardship throughout this extraordinary and perilous winter journey.

[Times Picaune, New Orleans, LA, Monday, April 1, 1844 p1]

1830:

“Starting from the Rocky Mountains late in December 1829 William L. Sublette and ‘Black’ Harris, with a pack dog team, made a winter journey to St. Louis reaching that town, apparently, on February 11, 1830. Little is known of their trip—presumably they traveled ‘Sublette’s Trace’ which would have brought them from the Platte to the Little Blue and down across Marshall and Pottawatomie counties of today to the Kansas river valley.” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.168]

1833:

“A late-in-the-year journey down from the mountains was made by Moses ‘Black’ Harris, Dr. Benjamin Harrison and one or two others. They left Ham’s Fork November 13, or soon after. Supposedly, George Holmes (bitten by a rabid wolf at rendezvous) was along, and died of rabies enroute.” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.255]

1836:

“June 3, 1836: Sab 4 Good Morn H & E I wrote last night till supper, after that it was so dark I could not see. I told you how many bipeds there was in our company last night now for the quadrupeds - 14 horses and six mules and fifteen head of Cattle. we milk four cows we started with seventeen but we have killed one calf and the Fur Company being out of provision have taken one of our cows for beaf it is usually pinching times with the company before they reach the buffalo, we have had a plenty because we made ample provision -- at Liberty we purchased a barrell of flour and baked enough to last us with killing a calf or two untill we reach the buffalo. The fur Com is large this year, we are really a moving village, nearly four hundred animals with ours mostly mules, and seventy men the fur Com have seven wagons and one cart, drawn by six mules each, heavily loaded, the cart drawn by two mules carries a lame man one of the proprietors of the com. we have two waggons in our com. Mr & Mrs S and Husband and myself ride on one Mr Gray and the baggage in the other our Indian boys drive the cows and Dulin the horses.

Young Miles leads our forward horses-four in each team. Now E if you wish to see the camp in motion look away ahead and see first the pilot and the Captain Fitzpatrick just before him - next the pack animals, all mules loaded with great packs soon after you will see the waggons and in the rear our company we all cover quite a space. The pack mules always string along one after the other just like Indians. There are several gentlemen in the Com who are going over the Mountains for pleasure, Capt Stewart - Mr Lee speaks of him in his journal he went over when he did and returned he is an Englishman - Mr. Celan. We had a few of them to tea with us last Monday eve, Capts Fitzpatrick Stewart Maj Harris and Celam. I wish I could discribe to you how we live so that you can realize it. Our manner of living is far prefferable to any in the States I never was so contented and happy before.

Neither have I enjoyed such health for years. In the Morn as soon as the day breaks the first that we hear is the word --- arise, arise, then the mules set up such noise as you never heard which puts the whole camp in motion. We encamp in a large ring, baggage and men tents and waggons on the outside and all the animals except the cows are fastened to pickets within the circle. This arrangement is to accommodate the guard who stand regularly every night and day also when we are not in motion, to protect our animals from the approach of Indians who would steal them. as I said the mules noise brings every man on his feet to loose them and turn them out to feed.” [Letters and Journal of Narcissa Whitman]

1837:

“In the spring (early May?) the American Fur Company’s *St. Peters* brought employees and equipment up the Missouri, probably to Chouteau’s Landing two miles below the Kaw’s mouth, in preparation for an expedition to the 13th annual rendezvous of the Rocky Mountain trappers. Two veteran mountain men in this company evidently holding responsible posts were ‘Black’ Harris and Etienne Provost. Joining the expedition here were Capt. William Drummond Stewart (heading West for the third time) and his well equipped party (about 10 in all), which included the artist Alfred Jacob Miller, L(evi?) Phillipson, F.Y. Ewing, and half-Indian Antoine Clement (as hunter and purveryor).” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.323]

1838:

“April 22-28—Andrew Drips headed the American Fur Company’s caravan which left Westport, Mo., on Sunday, the 22d, for the Rocky mountains. Moses (‘Black’) Harris was his lieutenant; additionally there were perhaps 45 company employees; and an outfit of 17 carts and some 200 horses and mules.” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.344]

“April 28 Major Harris comes, gives us a large piece of pork.” [On To Oregon, The Diaries of Mary Walker and Myra Eells, Editorial by Clifford Drury p.73]

“July 4 Capts. Drips, Walker and Robbins take dinner with us. Major Harris comes to us again. Says that the nine days out of the eleven it rained and snowed constantly since he left us. [Editorial note: It is possible that Harris, perhaps on his own initiative, rode ahead of the caravan and visited the site of the Rendezvous on Green River before going to Popo Agie. If so that would explain the notice that Ermatinger found on the door of the log cabin at Green River, of which mention will later be made.]” .” [On To Oregon, The Diaries of Mary Walker and Myra Eells, Editorial by Clifford Drury p.99]

“July 8 A company of 14 from the Hudson Bay Co. arrived. They came to Green River, expecting to find the rendezvous there. But on reaching (that place) found no signs. But in an old trading house, they found a line, ‘Come on to the Popeasia; plenty of whiskey & white women’ [Cushing Eells, gives the following explanation: ‘Some one who was somewhat friendly to the missionaries, either Dr. Robert Newell, an independent trapper, or a **half-breed** named Black Harris, who had learned of the rendezvous of the American Fur Company, had with charcoal written on the old storehouse door ‘Come to Popoazua on Wind River and you will find plenty trade, whiskey, and ‘white women.’.” [On To Oregon, The Diaries

of Mary Walker and Myra Eells, Editorial by Clifford Drury p.101]

“In late August and early September the American Fur Company caravan (including some 30 fur-laden wagons and carts) homeward bound from summer rendezvous (held near Riverton, Wyo.) crossed ‘Kansas’—doubtless retracing the ‘Oregon Trail’ pathway utilized on the westward march in April and May. Indications are that Moses (‘Black’) Harris, and probably Lucien Fontenelle, too, made this journey.” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.354]

1839:

“May 4—At Sapling Grove (about eight miles from Westport, Mo., in the Shawnee reserve) the various persons—27 in all—who were to comprise the American Fur Company caravan of 1839, gathered for their first overnight camp Moses (‘Black’) Harris headed the expedition.” (Traveling as independent individuals were Oregon bound missionaries Rev. John S. Griffin and his wife, Desire C. Smith; Asahel Munger and wife, Eliza; Paul Richardson, Peter Lassen and Dr. Frederick A. Wislizenus. Narratives of this journey from their perspective available in various locations). [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.368]

“Chapter 2: Our caravan was small. It consisted of only twenty-seven persons. Nine of them were in the service of the Fur Company of St. Louis (Chouteau, Pratte & Co.), and were to bring the merchandise to the yearly rendezvous on the Green River. Their leader was Mr. Harris, a mountaineer without special education, but with five sound senses, that he well knew how to use. All the rest joined the expedition as individuals. Among them were three missionaries, two of them accompanied by their wives, whom a Christian zeal for converting the heathen urged to the Columbia. Some others spoke of a permanent settlement on the Columbia; again, others intended to go to California, and so on. Almost all, however, were actuated by some commercial motive. The majority of the party were Americans; the rest consisted of French Canadians, a few Germans, and a Dane.

Chapter 7: The Ogallallas and Sioux had formerly been at war; but had made peace shortly before this, and had united. The Indians who visited our camp had received small presents, especially tobacco; and, as the fur company still had some flour, had been regaled with sweetened mush, which was so much to their taste that, after satiating themselves to the full, they had taken the remainder with them.

They also requested powder and whiskey, which was refused them on the pretext that we had no superfluity of the former, and nothing at all of the latter. Our leader, Harris, thoroughly realized that these unwelcome guests would further trouble us, and that just now was a most inadvisable time for crossing the river. So at night, after all the Indians had left, he caused the few barrels of spirits which he had with him to be buried, and enjoined on all of us the greatest vigilance. The night passed quietly." [A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in 1839 by F.A. Wislizenus]

1844:

THE OREGON—*Farnham vs. Black Harris.*

A communication has appeared in a paper published in Independence, Mo., from Moses Harris, contradicting certain statements made by the traveller, Farnham, in relation to Oregon and the road to that important, and at this crisis, very interesting region. Farnham has promulgated some just and very valuable information in regard to the extreme West, but as far as his representations refer to the nature of the road from the States, and in some other particulars, he has most assuredly fallen into error, and Mr. Harris has seized upon just the points with which he is, himself, thoroughly acquainted by long years of experience, to set the public right. He has travelled the route over and over again, and knows every tree, creek, spring, hill and hollow that lies in the way of the traveller. The statements of Farnham are well calculated to fling a discouraging

influence over the adventurous throng of emigrants now preparing to start for that country in the Spring; and, though we by no means wish either to encourage or discourage these people, yet, knowing the contradiction of Mr. Harris to be correct, we are bound to second him in advancing the truth. Farnham declares that there are distances of many days' travel where no wood can be obtained, and where travellers are sure to suffer. Now, it is only along the South Fork of the Platte, and even there, for not more than two or three encampments, that wood cannot be obtained. Besides, except in rainy weather, the *bois de vache* supplies every use for which wood is needed. In short, with an experienced mountaineer to direct, no party need fear *ever* being out of wood, for on entering an untimbered district they can pause and tie all the fuel they want upon their wagons. Let the emigrants secure a good guide, and they are safe enough.

[Times Picaune, New Orleans, LA, Mar 13, 1844 p1]

○ N. April 19, 1844, William, his wife, Rhoda Bell Prothero, and their four children took up the line of march for Oregon in Ford's company of 60 wagons with Moses Harris for guide. With Black Harris for a guide, Ford's company came through with no Indian attacks and with but a single death. When William Packwood started from St. Jo, his wife Rhoda was sickly and had to be helped in and out of the wagon, but in the course of the long journey grew strong and vigorous. Little Noah Packwood, youngest of the four children, learned to walk by pushing the water keg around as his mother prepared the breakfast or supper.

[Seattle Times, Seattle, WA, Sunday, October 15, 1951]

"May 14—Some 350 Oregon bound emigrants (who had assembled at Independence, Mo., and come by way of Westport, Mo., into Kansas) set out from 'Lone Elm' rendezvous (present Johnson county). They had hired as pilot the experienced mountain man Moses 'Black' Harris and their captain (formally elected at Wakarusa camp on the 25th) was Nathaniel Ford, of Howard county, Mo." [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.509]

From thi St. Louis Reveille.

The Petrified Forest.

"One of the most remarkable natural curiosities in Texas is a *petrified forest* near the head of Pasigono river. *It is turned to stone!* Some trees now growing, are partly petrified. This is a startling fact for the natural philosophers, and must cause them to modify the existing theory of petrification."—KENNEDY.

Many have visited the Rocky Mountains, who have never seen these forests of stone, but few have been there who have not heard of them.— Many have heard of them, who never believed in them, and many who have long disbelieved have lived to be convinced, either by their own eyes, or by authority too respectable to leave farther room for doubt. The present writer heard much of petrified forests, while among trappers and old traders in the mountains, but always with impenetrable incredulity. Moses Harris, the celebrated 'Black Harris,' is in the habit of embellishing the story he tells about them with very surprising touches of imagination. He deposes and says, that birds are there, sitting on the branches, the most hard-hearted things of all the feathered tribe, being solidified into stone, for all time to come! Another mountaineer will fight any man who won't believe that he once sharpened his knife upon the tail of

an eagle that was turned into stone while in the very act of whetting its own bill upon another rock. The man who tells this hard story farther declares, that he once carried a stone *sapling* of pine, five hundred miles on his shoulder, while travelling home on foot ; but, being overtaken by winter, he dropped the tree, knocked off and carried along the birds, and arrived at *Independence*, literally, with an important part of his personal apparel overflowing with rocks ! Such a style of romancing is humorous enough, but, when calculated to bring any important truth into discredit, the sooner it is set in its proper light the better. Eye witnesses, of thorough respectability, are now alive and well known in St. Louis, who can substantiate the following anecdote as a plain simple fact :

A few years since, an extensive trading party was out in the mountain regions, when a forest of this kind was discovered, in the vicinity of those ranges of elevations known as the 'Black Hills.' Singular enough, when considered in connection with such a story as we have now to relate, one of the party had with him an odd volume of the 'Arabian Nights ;' and had made himself highly popular among the simple-hearted *voyageurs* and people of the camp, by reading the fascinating Oriental tales of that admirable romance to them, by the camp-fire at night. To do this well, a supply of light was necessary, and the men eagerly sought every opportunity of securing pine knots for this purpose.

It was, if recollection is not misled, in the year 1823, and somewhere in the middle of the first month of autumn, as we obtain the story, that two of this party rode away from the line of camp, one afternoon, toward a distant appearance of timber, for the purpose of getting pine knots for the evening. The camp was then still in motion, and the two adventurers meant to get their knots and return, calculating to reach the camp about the time for the evening halt. They soon reached a cluster of pine trees, presenting every resemblance that was usual, and promising a rich gathering of the sort of fuel they were in search of. One was still occupied in fastening his animal, when he was startled by an extraordinary ringing sound behind him, and a volley of benediction, in demi French, semi Saxon, from his companion.

Malheur, be d-m ! *Tonnere* and *d'enfer* to be pay ! Wat is all zis ?

'What is the matter ?' said the other.

'Tis some rascal witch !' replied the Frenchman, half muttering in a soliloquy of astonishment.

'What is the matter ?' inquired the other again.

'Jane jes' look see here ?' said the astonished Gaul, picking his hatchet up from the ground, and showing a ruinous new cleft in the edge.

'Well, *what's* the matter ?' said his friend.

'*Wuas smazzer* ? Wy, will no you not see zere Ze tree is grow like d-m lie ?'

'O, come, come ! don't waste time ; you don't seem to know what you're talking about.'

'O, ye-es ! By bad name ! it eez you don't know much half wat you say !'

'Fiddle ! let's cut some knots.'

O, ye-es *fiddeel* ! Me shall tell you, we had most best let's cut some *steek* !'

'Cut stick ! What do you want to cut stick for !'

'I don't care ; I is go.'

The Frenchman was mounting his horse to be off, when his companion' hatchet in hand, and wondering what had got into the other, marched up to a young tree, and aimed a long sweeping blow at a part that seemed to suit his purpose.

Cleck eeng ! The hatchet flew out of his hand with a sharp rebound, and struck against another tree, ringing like a hammer on anvil.

'Ah, ha, wat you eez talk 'bout now, eh !' shouted the Frenchmen from his saddle. '*Malheur !* wat eez come ? Ze rocky mountain is go to grass, and turn into all tree ! *Blen ! c'est drote !*'

The incident we have only sought to present in native purity, as verbally obtained, nothing belonging to us in this sketch, save the mere setting together of words. That the forest exists there, at the head of the Chayenne river, in the vicinity of the Black hills, is as certain as that there are no stone trees around St. Louis and very few wooden ones on the Platte.

The effect produced upon the Frenchmen that we have spoken of, was to make him believe, implicitly, in all the stories that he had ever read before, from the Arabian Nights. And nothing ever after could convince him that the flying palaces of Aladdin, the wonderful caverns and transcendent gardens, the abodes of the Genii, and the wonderful extravagance of the fairies, was anything but most solemn truth, set down in a book.

Thousands will read about a 'Petrified Forest,' still disbelieving that any such thing can exist in nature, and this writer knows well how deep he is plunging into the reputation of a romancer, by this sketch: but the story is told, and the learned or unlearned in theoretical petrification, are welcome to make what they please of it.

Some things are bound to be laughed at before they are believed; and some things are sure to be laughed at after they are believed. Now philosophers are cautioned to be careful how they believe, in regard to this petrified forest, and whether they believe or laugh first, is left for their excellent and active discerning to decide.

[Times, Hartford, CT, Saturday, August 17, 1844 p1]

[Alexandria Gazette, Alexandria, VA, Tuesday, November 5, 1844 p.1]

[Illinois Weekly State Journal, Springfield, IL, Thursday, December 12, 1844 p.1]

1845:

From the Vicksburg Intelligencer.
DR. WHITE'S NARRATIVE,

(Promised yesterday.)

"They left the beach of the Pacific on the 30th of July, some forty miles from the Umqua river, and arrived in the Colony about the 10th of August. They found the Legislature in session at Oregon City, and Dr. White being officially requested to bear a memorial and petition emanating from that body and signed unanimously by them, also by the Judge of the Territory and Executive Committee, to the Congress of the U. States, left on the 16th. They arrived at Fort Vancouver, on the 17th, the Dalles of the Columbia on the 20th, and on the 23d proceeded on their journey.

At the first camp, Major Moses Harris, alias "Black Harris," his pilot and his dependence as interpreter for the Sioux and Pawnee Indians in passing through their country, without any difference or explanation, withdrew from the party and returned to the valley. Surprised, but nothing intimidated, they moved forward. They met the Wallawalla Indians—so much excited the spring before, by reason of the violent and treacherous death of Elijah Hending, an educated young chief of distinction, killed by a white man in California—and were handsomely saluted and cordially received—the excitement having entirely subsided. Corn, potatoes, peas, camas and cherries, were brought forward for the consumption of the party, and their plantations, with those of the Keyuse, speak well for their advancement in agriculture and civilization. Not many of the Wallawallas cultivate; they generally subsist on fish.

[Richmond Whig, Richmond, VA, Thursday, December 25, 1845 p1]

“Meek reached The Dalles and told the missionaries about the immigrants being lost, but they apparently had no way of sending aid. A mountain man there named Moses Harris, who was called ‘The Black Squire’, got some salmon and other food from the Indians and, leading several horses with it, went to the help of the other immigrants. They were near the mouth of the Tygh, about 35 miles from The Dalles.” [Conversations With Pioneer Women by Fred Lockley, The Mrs. J.F Galbraith Diary p. 243]

“Meek reached The Dalles and sent Black Harris, who knew the country, to guide our party to The Dalles. He brought some food on pack horses and met us not far from where Tygh Creek enters the Deschutes.” [Conversations With Bullwhackers, Muleskinners, Pioneers.....by Fred Lockley, Richard Watson Helm Reminiscence p. 138]

1846:

Finally, in 1846, Levi Scott, together with Lindsay and Jesse Applegate, David Goff, Moses “Black” Harris, and other pioneers, found a practical route that linked the valley with the Humboldt River-California Trail. The new road was no highway. It led through the Black Rock desert of Nevada, into and out of the Klamath Basin, over the Siskiyou, and through the rugged Umpqua canyon. There were obstacles aplenty, including steep grades, stretches of forbidding desert, and warlike Indians.

[Oregonian, Portland, OR, Wednesday, February 11, 1959 p.7C
abstract of article on establishment of Southern Route]

“At Fort Hall we were met by Jesse Applegate, Moses Harris, David Goff and John Owens, who told us of an easier road to the Willamette Valley than the one by way of The Dalles. It was called the Southern Route, and had been laid out by a party of settlers from Polk County—Levi Scott, Benjamin Burch, the Applegates and others.” [Conversations With Pioneer Women by Fred Lockley, Lucy Ann Henderson Dedy p.81]

“Moses Harris, usually known as ‘the Black Squire’, was an associate of Joe Meek. He had been a trapper and mountain man and was thoroughly familiar with the Indians and spoke the Shoshone language. He settled in the Willamette Valley in 1844.” [Visionaries, Mountain Men & Empire Builders by Fred Lockley p. 280]

For the Oregon Spectator.

MR. EDITOR:—As the people of the United States as well as those of Oregon, are deeply interested in the success of the company who have lately returned from exploring a southern route from the United States to this valley, it is the intention of that party in due season to give to their fellow citizens, whose philanthropy has prompted them to contribute to the success of this arduous undertaking, a full report of their travels and discoveries; and until such report is ready to be made public, it is certainly doing an injustice to those who have been engaged in this important service, to attempt to forestall public opinion, by the publication of such statements as are made in an editorial article headed "The Emigration," which appeared in the 20th number of the Spectator.

Notwithstanding the "early and safe arrival of *all* the emigration by the Mount Hood road," it appears that some are yet in the mountains, and many more beyond, who cannot either *safely* or *unsafely*, arrive by the Mount Hood road this season, and those who have succeeded in passing the moun-

tains have suffered losses in proportion to their numbers, full as great, as any previous emigration; some of those last getting through, having lost half, and others the whole, of their animals.

Facts, so far from proving favorable to the old road, go to show the decided advantage of the new. The emigrants on the new route, though greatly delayed by sickness, and the opening and breaking the way over timbered mountains and trackless plains, have arrived in the valley west of the Cascade mountains more than *five weeks ago*, and "the families who have abandoned their wagons" amount to *one only*. This they have done by traveling a distance not exceeding that from Fort Hall to Wallawalla, and without meeting the tenth part of the natural obstacles encountered on the old route. From the Rogue river valley to Oregon City, in less than ten years, there will be continuous settlements, there being but two narrow ridges of coast mountain between; the one sixteen, the other eight miles over.

Were you, Mr. Editor, to take the trouble to examine the files of your paper, you would find that others, as well as Goff and

Applegate, have spent their time and money in the public service, and are equally deserving the praise or censure of the public. And as the hope of pecuniary reward had no share in inducing them to undertake an expedition which was justly considered one of great danger, labor and privation, they have with equal magnanimity brought it to a successful issue. From the emigrants who are traveling the new road, they have neither asked nor received any thing except by purchase; and to those who have assisted them in opening the road, they have bound themselves as individuals to the payment of one dollar and fifty cents per day.

Let me tell you, Mr. Editor, the company to which I am proud to belong, did not leave their homes to ride a few days up the Willamette river and return with a false report to the people: they went seriously determined to find a road, if one was to be found: they went actuated by the purest motives, and in the spirit of patriotism and philanthropy, and were more than successful.

They have explored and opened a wagon road to the western valley of Oregon which may be traveled at any and at all seasons, by a shorter and in all respects better route than any heretofore known.

They have made it easy for wagons to pass between Oregon and California, which has hitherto been impracticable.

They have found a way by which the southern rivers of Oregon may be connected by rail road to the bay of San Francisco without crossing a single hill.

On the road they have found a mail may be carried at all seasons, and a rail road may reach the Bay of San Francisco from the U. S. without crossing the Sierra Nevada, or, to the Willamette, without crossing the Cascade Mountains.

And lastly, by their own unassisted means, they have succeeded in establishing a connecting link between the waters of Oregon, and those of the great interior basin of California, before unknown, and which one of the ablest explorers in the service of the United States attempted, without success.

Such, Mr. Editor, are the achievements of the exploring party, which envy and cupidity would render nugatory!!!

nor will we permit ourself to be charged falsely and unjustly, especially by those whose fears would seem to be the only source of their imputations.

As the editor of this paper, we write and publish that which we believe to be the truth, with the promotion of the general interest always in view; and it is to be hoped that we shall continue to have nerve enough to pursue this course regardless of consequences.

[Oregon Spectator, November 26, 1846 p2]

"GREAT CRY AND LITTLE WOOL."—In another column will be found an article over the signature of "Moses Harris," in which we are charged with an "attempt to forestall public opinion," inasmuch, as in the discharge of our editorial duties, we had occasion to prepare and publish an article in which we simply gave, in a statement of facts, all the intelligence that we could obtain concerning the emigration, without any reference, in word, or even in thought, as to the comparative merits of the routes by which emigrants have arrived here this season. We do not know, however, that we would have hesitated in giving the information in question, had it actually been necessary to have gone into an argument as to the merits of these routes. We are not easily deterred in the performance of any thing that we esteem to be a duty. As to the charge of forestalling public opinion, we refer our readers with a great deal of pleasure, to the article

complained of, and feel well assured that every unprejudiced mind cannot fail to perceive how unfounded is the charge.

We have a "bone to pick" with Mr. Harris; for, by the article over his signature, he makes it our unpleasant duty, not only to deny some of his asseverated *facts*, but to prove that which is quite the reverse. It is hardly worth while to state, in passing, that in no single instance has Mr. Harris quoted our language correctly: almost any sentence can be so perverted as to mean what was not intended. There is no occasion to quibble or use sophistry in this matter. If the emigrants by the southern route "arrived in *the* valley west of the Cascade mountains more than five weeks ago," what then? They might suffer and starve on this side just as easily as on the other;—the settlements, Mr. Harris, the settlements, what time *did* they arrive at the settlements, their destination? or,

have they yet arrived? What's the use of saying "the families who have abandoned their wagons amount to one only"? Did not Mr. James Campbell abandon two, Davidson, one, Vanderpool, one, Long, one, Van Bebber, one, and Watkins, one?

They did, and we have evidence to establish the same. It is not wise to live in glass houses and throw stones.

We are not aware that there are any emigrants by the Mount Hood road, who are yet in the mountains and unable to get through this season, as intimated by Mr. Harris; on the contrary, we know that there are none. The rearward company, consisting of seven wagons, arrived here during the first week in the present month.

We have not the space, if we had the inclination, at this time to argue as to the advantages or disadvantages of either route; the pleasure, therefore, of surprising Mr. Harris and his friends with an exposition of our views thereupon, is unavoidably deferred to some future occasion. Far be it from us to speak disparagingly of any scientific undertaking—much less of one that promised such important beneficial consequences to Oregon. Nor would we withhold from any member of that exploring party, a single iota of his deserts. We mentioned Messrs. Goff and Applegate, because theirs were the only names that we knew of the party; nor do we now know the number or names of the gentlemen who composed the expedition.

A word more and we have done. We do not love to be found fault with without the shadow of a cause,

nor will we permit ourself to be charged falsely and unjustly, especially by those whose fears would seem to be the only source of their imputations.

As the editor of this paper, we write and publish that which we believe to be the truth, with the promotion of the general interest always in view; and it is to be hoped that we shall continue to have nerve enough to pursue this course regardless of consequences.

1847:

“July 28—The year’s first party from Oregon arrived at St. Joseph, Mo. R.H. Holder (of the 1846 emigration West) and 14(?) other men were in this company These travelers had made the trip in 83 days. They had left Oregon City on (and about) May 5; traveled the Applegate cutoff (or ‘southern’) route (having as their guide to Fort Hall, Levi Scott); separated into two parties for part of the journey in. The advance party of eight was at South Pass on June 26, and was sad to have ‘over 20 horses and mules with them, mostly laden with packs of robes, skins, etc.’. Among these eight, as far as the Mormon ferry on the North Platte, was Moses (‘Black’) Harris.” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.707]

“October 27—Overland from the Sacramento valley via the California-Oregon trail was Com. Robert F. Stockton, U.S.N. with his staff Guide Moses ‘Black’ Harris, who had joined the commandore west of South Pass, traveled only to St. Joseph with Stockton.” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.722]

1848:

“The Gazette of May 5, noted, also, the arrival of Moses (‘Black’) Harris from the front camp of the Oregon emigrants, with a report the various trains for Oregon and California were all getting on well except the last met company (unidentified) which was camped (some 35 miles from St. Joseph) distant from water, leaderless and ‘in utter confusion’, having lost nearly all their oxen (strayed, or stolen by Indians.)” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.745]

1849:

“April 18—Moses (‘Black’) Harris, overland from ‘Fort John’ (Laramie), arrived at St. Joseph, Mo. He reported there had been a ‘very successful’ trapping season—the traders having ‘procured a large number of robes, skins, etc.’; and that there was deeper snow at Fort John than for many years past.” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p.825]

The Emigrants Moving.

The Independence correspondent of the St. Louis Republican under the date of April 27, says—

The California emigrants are fast moving out. The first train of the "Pioneer Line" has moved out, and is now in camp about ten miles from here. The proprietors have secured the services of the celebrated Moses Harris, known to everybody, who has lived in the mountains, or passed the road to California or Oregon, as "Black Harris." As a guide, you are probably aware he has but few, if any, superiors.

A second train will start on the first of June. One hundred and eight passengers go out in the first train, if they all arrive here in time.

There are a few cases of sickness here—some two or three deaths within the past week, supposed to be cholera. We hear that the cholera and small pox, prevail to some extent at St. Joseph.

[Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia, PA, Wednesday, May 16, 1849 p1]

From the St. Louis Republican, May 5.

INDEPENDENCE, April 27, 1849.

There are a few cases of sickness here—some two or three deaths within the past week, supposed to be cholera. We hear that the cholera and small pox prevail to some extent at St. Joseph. The California emigrants are fast moving out. There is a report in town that G. W. Paul's company have lost thirty mules, which strayed away from camp between this and the Kansas river.

The first train of the "Pioneer Line" has moved out, and is now in camp about ten miles from here. The proprietors have secured the services of the celebrated Moses Harris, known to everybody who has lived in the mountains, or passed the road to California or Oregon, as "Black Harris." As a guide, you are probably aware, he has but few, if any, superiors.

A second train will start on the first of June. One hundred and eight passengers go out in the first train, if they all arrive here in time.

[Spectator, New York, NY Thursday, May 17, 1849 p.2]

"May 13—Turner & Allen's (or, Turner, Allen & Co's.) 'Pioneer (commercial) Line' first train..... left a camp (established in April) about 10 miles west of Independence, Mo., to begin the journey to Upper

California' by way of the Oregon-California trailSeveral cholera deaths already had occurred among the company: 'Capt. Gillespie' (described as 'one of the principal managers of the line') on May 5; mountain man Moses ('Black') Harris (employed as a guide), and the Rev. Mr. Goheen on the 6th” [The Beginning of the West by Louise Barry p. 861]

“WEARING BUCKSKIN IN THE FORTIES--From Stories of “First Settlement of Polk county: by Jess Applegate.

Uncle Jesse Applegate, who has so often delighted the readers of the Observer with his stories of the early days in Polk county favors us with another letter this week, He says: “I could not visit the lava beds, and did not write you from Captain Jack’s stronghold, as I had expected to do, but I have not forgotten Old Polk, and so send another short chapter of ‘ancient history’ for the Observer and our friends.” “It is light literature,” says the author, “but you know ‘a little nonsense now and then is relished by the best of men.’” Uncle Jess’ letter is as follows:

Speaking of clothing, I acknowledge a prejudice against buck-skin. But if I were clever, I could do it justice have seen poems printed on buckskin, notable “The Days of ‘49.” I have heard of notes written on buckskin to hold against parties notoriously slow in meeting their obligations and I knew Buckskin Bill, and “there were no flies on him.” I admit, tho, that where there is never any rain, mist or fog, a man arrayed in buckskin would be a daisy, and might be mistaken for “a lily of the valley,” or “Solomon in all his glory.”

But in a climate like that of Webfoot, whose excessive damp-ness has made wags bold to say that it rains “thirteen months of the year” to perpetrate such slanders as this. East of the mountains I saw a man who had wintered near Portland, and asked him if it rained much down there. He said there were only two showers while he was there. The first shower, he said, began in November and continued to the middle of February; then there was a crack in the clouds, and the sun shone one day; then the second shower set in and continued until the first Monday in June. Buckskin wearing apparel could hardly be tolerated.

As to coats, I presume our people realized, without trying the experiment, how, wretchedly disagreeable a buckskin coat would be where there was so much wet weather, for I remember seeing only one man wearing such a coat. He was a trapper from the mountains, known by us as “Black Harris,” for, tho a white man, his face was the color of his coat. He left the valley before the first shower commenced.

As long as there was a fragment of his old tent or wagon-cover left, big enough to make a coat, a settler would use it for that purpose before he would resort to buckskin, and in default of those would go in his shirt sleeves. Altho no privation would compel a man to wear a buckskin coat, the case with pants was different; for, tho a man might go in his shirt sleeves, he would not be tolerated on the road or at a quilting in his shirt-tail. He had to wear trousers of some kind, however disagreeable they might be. But buckskin was worn only when stern necessity required the sacrifice.

A man coming home at noon, for instance, with his pants water-logged, would take them off, dry himself before the fire, and, while they were being relieved of a quart or so of water, by wringing and evaporation, would enjoy himself during the afternoon doing chores about the house and barn.

Now after a man had suffered long and patiently, and had resorted to many ingenious shifts in his efforts to make the wearing of buckskin pants endurable, it seemed like adding insult to injury to finally discover that as a result of the wetting and drying they had assumed a fixed shape that admit of no reformation--a shape the like of which was never seen “in the heaven above, on the earth below, nor in the earth beneath. The malformation did not appear when a man was sitting; but when he rose the appearance to an inexperienced eye was that he was not yet up. The knees of his pants did not respond to

the straightening of his legs, but held the shape of the sitting posture, and the seat did like wise, and a man could hang his hat on the knee or seat projection. During the first stages of demoralization, buckskin pants, tho not so outlandish in appearance, were a greater drawback to the enjoyment of life and liberty; for, before the stage of permanent projections, a man coming in wet, without his presence of mind and forethot about him, would be apt to hover around near the fire until a feeling of numbness in hips and legs, indicating obstructed circulation, slowly but surely opened his eyes to the fact that he was in a tight place. His first thot was to get out of the house, but when he attempted to walk he discovered that he was as stiff as a board. Then he tried to sit down, and, failing in this, the sudden realization of his helpless condition alarmed him, and he called for help.

Now, "there were no giants in those days," but the sufferer in this case, peradventure, was a big man, and the united strength of his family and a hired man would not be sufficient, were he toppled from an upright poise on his feet, to keep him from falling to the puncheon floor with an awful crash, and rupturing his pants. But the resourceful pioneer called for a rope and when it was brot, he threw it over a joist above his head, and with one end grasped in his hands and the other held by the hired man, with the wife and children supporting at the head and shoulders, he was decently laid out on the floor; and there he lay, the very picture of many beauty, for the buckskin environment was such an exact fit that the perfections of Apollo's form carved in marble did not stand forth in bolder relief than his.

But as soon as the wife recovered her presence of mind, she realized that this was not the time to enjoy a show, for the pewter buttons on her husband's pants had begun to give way to the strain upon them and whizz about the house. One struck the hired man on the gable end of his nose, and as he retreated up the ladder to his buffalo-robe, old quilt and coyote-skin bed, on a platform of boards in the loft of the cabin, he was followed by a roar of laughter from the children. Now, after the hired man was knocked out, he did not return to the family circle until morning, hence the incompleteness of this report.

It is not denied that some of the hired men, aforetime, were manufacturers as well as rail-splitters, and this report of the evening's exercises was manufactured by the hired man, and recited at a "quiltin' and candy-pullin'," after we had made maple sugar, to amuse the young folks and impress their minds with a just appreciation of the "privations and tribulations suffered and endured by the mudsills of the Western Empire." So be it then, whatsoever people may say of the manufactured article; since the raw material was genuine, "the goods are all wool and a yard wide."

I am free to admit, moreover, that such an experience as that suffered by the hero of the hired man's story was rare among the men; for a man once laid out in this way, helpless and compelled to submit to derisive laughter and other personal indignities, would not be caught in such straightened circumstances again. The boys, ever heedless and forgetful, were caught in the remorseless grip of buckskin every few days all thru the wet season, and tho it was a great drawback to their present enjoyment, peradventure, it was the "makin of the man."

The mental discipline was good, and the physical culture was not often lacking. When a boy's pants had drawn to such a tightness as to be no protection to his person, and to hamper him so that he could not flee from the wrath to come, his irate mother, whose warnings had slipt his mind, could get her work in with a hazel sprout and warm him up for contributory negligence, with a swipe or two thrown in on "general principles." It has been remarked by psychologists that a boy who was graduated from this training-school, and had grown to man's estate, would never forget what had slipt his mind. [Donated to Old Polk, March 1903, by the author.] [The Polk County Observer, March 13, 1903]