

# GEORGE W. PRICKETT

Letters,

1849

Transcribed

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by  
Richard L. Rieck  
Dept. of Geography  
Western Illinois University  
Macomb

manuscript, 3 p.  
Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, IL

Indian Territory opposite St Joseph, May 8th, 1849

My Dear Julia,

Messers Alexander, Treadway, Lusk & myself, arrived here safe on the 27<sup>th</sup> ult: after a very pleasant trip, The St Joseph had about 150 passengers, and was very fortunate as to sickness, not even having any symptoms of Cholera on board, all the Boats that have arrived since have lost more or less of their passengers by that fatal disease, one boat having lost 25 between St Louis and this place,

We hear considerable talk of Cholera in St Jo, but little regard is paid to it, There is an immense Croud of people here of all ages & sex bound for the Gold region, and nearly all are provided with large Wagons too heavily loaded to ensure their safe arrival in California & but few have the means to provide themselves differently, I shudder at the thought of very many who are here now full of energy and high expectations suffering & perishing in the Mountains this winter,

M<sup>r</sup> Adams & mess Cross[ed] the river yesterday and I think they will be able to get through in good season, We sold our large Wagon and have purchased a very small light one and some pack saddles, & have sold out the most of our outfit, leaving us 70 days provisions Jent[?] Clothing & C not exceeding 1700<sup>lbs</sup> in all, which will enable us to pass all 4 mule or ox Wagons before arriving at Fort Laramie, We expect to proceed on our route as fast as practicable, and will be joined by a sufficient number of packers to guard ourselves through safe, and hope to arrive in California in 65 or 70 days from this time

M<sup>r</sup> Norton arrived & encamped 4 Miles from Town the day before we got to St Jo, we all went to Camp where we remained until we went to

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the Town to Cross the river, where we had to remain two days before we Could get over with our wagons & teams, \_

The Land back of St Jo is high rolling prairie & very rich soil & pretty Country, St Joseph is now 5 years old, has a population of 1800 souls, 25 Stores 5 Hotels 4 Churches and mechanics of every Kind, all Kept busy preparing outfits for the emigrants, I am well pleased with the place, It will doubtless be the largest City on the Missouri river, and If I had the means with me I should purchase some property, I had rather own lots here than at Alton, I am sorry that your uncle declined Coming up with us I feel Confident he would like the place, and Could do well to invest some money at this point, If his business will justify his taking a trip this summer, advise him to visit St Joseph,

There is a rumor in Town tod[a]y that the Indians have destroyed one Company on their way to

California but I do[ ]not Credit it. it may be true however, There will be so great an anxiety among the emigrants to get through quick that they may not use sufficient precaution: and many May loose their animals and lives, I hope the result may be different with all and our mess in particular, & I feel Confident of having your good wishes at least,

M<sup>r</sup> Hall spoke of going through Mexico this winter & joining us, I have but little hope of his doing so, If he should however you could have an opportunity of sending me your Miniature and desire you to do so, you Could Convey it to him in a small package so that he would[ ]not Know the Contents, or where it Came from, I should value it very highly & esteem it as a further mark of your Confidence & affection;

We have been encamped near a farmer house where we Could get good bread & butter, but expect to dispense with every thing of that sort and take it rough & tumble from this until we arrive home,

I have not heard from M<sup>r</sup> Horace Hall yet, & do[ ]not Know whether he is above or below here, If he could see all the Wagons about this place

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I think he would think strongly of Sweet Home before leaving for the plaines with heavy ox Teams,

A Boat sunk a few days since near[?] Council Bluffs, loaded with emigrants, many met with heavy losses, Messers Job, Gillham Brown & others from Madison County were on board they lost none of their Wagons or mules, but lost all their other outfit & had to Come down here to procure new supplys and have started up to Fort Kearny by land, The Alton Co had cross the river before we arrived and may be out some distance, I have not seen any of them, Messers Davis & Terrill of Belleville Crossed the day before we arrived and made off immediately, I met with young Murray a few days ago & went to his Camp, he is in good health & looks like he could go through if his teams do[ ]not fail, All the men from Ed[wards]ville have had excellent health, except M<sup>r</sup> Alexander who has been a little unwell, he has recovered having been under the skilful treatment of your humble Servant, \_

Please excuse this uninteresting & disconnected letter, as my hands & head are full of business, after I arrive in California I will write you a full account of our trip, and try and make up something of interest, you are & will be differently situated & can write often, I shall feel very anxious to hear from you on arriving at the Diggins, write frequently & give me all the news of the town and Direct to Sutters Fort, Please give my respects to your aunt & uncle, and believe me yours affectionately,

Geo W. Prickett

P.S. I wrote the above in Camp & expected to cross the river at St Jo. but find such a croud of wagons here we now start to a ferry up the river a few miles. Please hand the enclosed slip to your uncle,

G W P

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Sacramento City Upper California, August 31<sup>st</sup> 1849

Dearest Julia,

We arrived at Sutters Mill on the 5<sup>th</sup> inst: 55 miles from this City. after a passage of 83 days from St Joseph,

The Country from the Missouri river to the south fork of the Platte is a very pretty rolling prairie, but very scarce of timber, but will doubtless be attached to the states & would answer very well for Cultivation,

Fort Kearney (or Childs) is a military Post situate opposite Grand Island, on the Platte river, which is filled with Islands Covered with willow & Cottonwood, We traveled up said river 150 Miles to a ford, we crossed the river & struck the north fork & followed up said fork 300 miles, overtook Capt Adams & mess on the north fork and Continued with them the balance of the trip,

There are but few Curiosities on the route, the Country being mostly barren hills & mountains, Crossed the north fork in the a ferry boat made of two Canoes lashed together & swam ~~ovr~~ our mules over the river, which is a very swift stream shallow and Muddy, Chimney rock, Independance rock & Devils Gate, you will find in Fremonts work, For several hundred miles we had to depend upon wild sage for fuel, a very good substitute, We got along with as little difficulty as any Company that has passed the plains & in the shortest time made by any other wagons,

We fortunately disposed of our large wagon & Came through with light loads, which enabled us to pass some 4000 wagons on the way & got through with our mules in pretty good Condition, which we sold at prices sufficient to pay each man over \$100- over & above the amount paid into the Company. The trip can be made with safety, if Care is taken in the selection of animals & start with light loads, almost every person started wrong, heavy wagons, & larger loads, & the Consequence was that they broke down their teams, threw away their loading, abandoned their wagons and I greatly fear that hundreds will find it difficult to get through with their lives,

We passed the Rocky Mountains with safety, They are Mere hills when Compared with the Sierra Nevada Mountains,

Ft: Hall is a trading post owned by the Hudson Bay Co. built of mud brick on the banks of Lewises Fork of the Columbia river, Most of the Traders at these posts have Indian wives, they Consider it necessary to marry into the tribes to give them influence & safety in the Country,

The most tedious part of the trip is on the Humboldt or Mary's river, the water

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is very poor & grass scarce, The road followed this stream 350 miles, over very sandy & dusty roads, the river wastes away in the sand & is finally lost in a large alkaline lake, We passed Many Warm & Hot Springs on our route salt and alkaline sloughs & ponds of water, & passed over dry beds of saleratus lakes Covered with a thick substance white as chalk, (may of the emigrants obtained a supply of saleratus for the trip,)

After leaving the sink of Mary's river, we struck a Desert of 80 miles, without water or grass, which we passed with safety but with Considerable suffering for water, both by men & animals,

We were deceived as to the distance & provided ourselves with but little water, I started in advance of the wagons with some loose animals and got through with the loss of one Horse which was unable to go forward, I was some ten hours without a drop of water & passed & overtook many men suffering from thirst, their tongues so swollen that they Could hardly speak, the day was very hot & most of the road Deep sand, our wagons got within 8 miles of the water & was left & the mules taken on to water, The Digger Indians took advantage of the Condition of the suffering emigrants & Killed or drove off a large number of animals, all in fact that were left on the Desert, We were all Compelled to submit to our loss as none had animals able to follow them,

The road leading from the sink to Carsons river is a new one traveled this spring by a party of Mormons from the salt Lake, It is thought to be better over the mountains than the one formally traveled, but if the old one is worse than the one traveled by us I cannot imagine how it was possible for wagons to be brought over with safety.

we were some seven days Crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains, some days Making but 8 or 10 days Miles, passing over beds of snow, rocks. hills & cliffs of rocks that looked almost impassable but we all got through with safety, none of our party having the least sickness except Myself, From improvident exposure in the water I was quite unwell for several days before reaching Fort Hall, my health is now good, but all feel worn out by fatigue and the warm weather,

We remained at the mills but a short time, mined but little & moved down to this City, where we hope to get at something soon. Mining is extremely hard work and will not suit me, I am perfectly satisfied that this is a very rich mineral Country. & that men can make more money by work than they can in the states, but fortunes that I and many others considered within our grasp is not so easily obtained. I feel assured however that if I can have my health that I can be well paid for all the labor I am willing to do, and hope to return home at the end of two

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years with a sufficient amount to situate myself Comefortable and hope to find you well and willing to share my fortune be the same much or little,

This city was layed off about 5 months since & now contains a population of 5000 persons, & I presume there is not 20 females in the place, The Citizens occupy Tents, Cloth houses & C, Rent Board & every thing is extravagantly high, and nearly every house & Tent in the place is a Grocery & Gambling Shop, large sums of money are won & lost every day & night in the week, I feel Certain that I shall ho[have] no disposition to Gamble for one Cent, nor run into any