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WRITING INTO THE SUNSET: WOMEN CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN OVERLAND TRAIL DIARIES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

The images that shape and are shaped by the dominant narrative of Western Expansion are most commonly manifested in character-types and legends that embody free-spiritedness, nationalism, and rugged individualism; few embody the everyday experiences of women. These experiences were recorded in journals that covered in detail exact miles traveled, geographical markers such as creeks and hills, births, deaths, gravestones, foodways, and natural resources. While these typical kinds of entries do not have the narrative appeal that is generally associated with the "Wild West," they are engaging in their immediacy. We have access to the concerns of a woman on the trail, heading into the unknown, with no idea of how her story will end. Her version of Western Expansion is one of day-to-day survival and daily tasks, written down as a way of carving an existence into the endless prairies and mountains.

These records, in the form of diaries, reminiscences, and letters are the objects of folkloric analysis in this dissertation. The performance-centered approach as well as personal experience narrative and feminist theories inform my analysis of three different categories of records of the overland journey. Based on degree of self-consciousness of a reading audience and the constructedness of the narrative, I divided them into chronicles, self-conscious journals, and reminiscences. From there, I analyzed representative records to reveal individual responses to the westward journey as well as the identity of the individual constructed in the record.
To my grandmother
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The West of American imagination often includes images of silhouetted cowboys riding off into the sunset. Or perhaps swinging saloon doors and sheriffs’ deputies. Or still yet mountain men, trappers and miners. If images of women come to mind, they are women in less glorified positions, such as a husband’s helpmate, a refined woman turned drudge, or saloon girls. These are images that categorize men and women stereotypically. Little attention is paid to individual experience, especially women’s. In order to reveal some of these experiences, I have examined nine women’s journals of the overland trail to the Pacific, which constitute a genre of women’s expressive behavior that is fertile ground for folklore study. The journals are a vernacular record of a historical movement that tells us about how pioneer women shaped their individual response to Western Expansion, and through their expressions we can see their strength and identity take shape.

As described above, the images that shape and are shaped by the dominant narrative of Western Expansion are more commonly manifested in character-types and legends that embody free-spiritedness, nationalism, and rugged individualism; few speak to the everyday experiences of women, and in
particular, women on the overland trail. These experiences were recorded in journals that covered in detail exact miles traveled, geographical markers such as creeks and hills, births, deaths, gravestones, foodways, and natural resources. A typical entry reads: “May 9. Drove 12 or 15 miles had a hard rain in the forenoon stopped an hour at noon encamped at night in the prairie with tolerable grass and water but no wood, cooked with weeds. Passed 11 graves” (from the diary of Susan Marsh Cranston, May 8-Aug. 27, 1851). While this entry does not have the narrative appeal that is generally associated with the “Wild West,” it is engaging in its immediacy. We have access to the concerns of a woman on the trail, heading into the unknown, with no idea how her story will end. Her version of Western Expansion is one of day-to-day survival and daily tasks, written down as a way of carving an existence into the endless prairies and mountains.

I. Nineteenth-century Women’s Roles

Women’s roles on the trails

The great migration westward along the overland trail was undertaken primarily in the years 1843-1865 (Jeffrey xi). Men went west with great hopes for the land of plenty. Women, however, went because their husbands were going, though most were not averse to the idea. Their positions on the journey and after were to be the portable vessels of culture, concerned with domestic chores and with maintaining the morals, education, and social proprieties of their Eastern homes. However, many of the Victorian influences on traditional roles of women were compromised in order to overcome hardships as well as to
maintain a suitable lifestyle for the family, especially on the road. Women loaded and unloaded the wagons, walked in the dust beside the wagons, often drove the team of oxen, and at the same time tended to the cooking and the children (Schlissel, Women's Diaries 12). After settling, women often had to work to help support the family while their husbands were out gold prospecting, or in the event that their husbands died. The collective experience of these women has helped to shape our images of pioneer women and their roles.

The journey, on one hand, somewhat leveled social and gender roles. Pioneer women are remembered and represented as hardy individuals who even helped with traditionally male chores. On the other hand, their sex was assigned the task of maintaining traditionally female roles, roles which were to bring American civilized culture to the "Wild West." This conflict of identity could be seen as a conflict between masculine and feminine realms or civilization and the wilderness. This conflict is continually present in these women's diaries, and I believe that interpreting the presence and absence of identities the women put forth in these diaries will help us to understand not only the frontier women and the experiences that shaped and revised their lives, but also the frontier that has been for so long defined by the masculine realm.

**Social roles in the East**

The social context in which these diaries were written influenced women's writing and conduct on the trail. Families were moving from their Eastern homes where social values and women's and men's roles were closely adhered to. While the nineteenth-century American male was out in the world
building railroads and conquering frontiers, the American woman was at home
upholding domestic and religious values. The society that the women diarists
came from was fraught with proprieties for women. Books on etiquette and
behavior abounded and cautionary tales were a favorite mode of teaching
young women how to behave. A woman may not even have had to read
etiquette books to know how to think about herself and to know how others
thought about her; it was ingrained in the society. Society's definition of women
was primarily based on her biology, from which followed assumed differences
in psychological makeup. Religion was also a factor in prescribing roles for
women.

According to Julie Roy Jeffrey, ideas about "womanhood" changed with
the economic changes that occurred during the early 1800's. A market
economy and industrialization in the Northeast ended a home system of
economy--where the whole family was needed to sustain living--and began an
economy where men worked outside the home. Women continued to work at
home in an "unstructured, loose, and sociable manner," helping make home a
distinct realm aside from the realm of the male workplace (Jeffrey 5). The
impact of this divergence was that women's work was no longer economically
necessary to the family, and thus the value of their work decreased. With the
increasing availability of manufactured goods, women's work was marginalized
even more (Jeffrey 5).

Coming to the rescue of women's roles was Sarah Hale, editor of
_Godey's Lady's Book_, a nineteenth-century periodical for women. She, as well
as others, claimed that women had significant cultural and social roles, and they
developed and publicized this stance through magazines, lectures, sermons, and any other public discourse. They claimed that women had it in their nature to devote themselves to others, to be feeling rather than thinking beings, devoid of ego and pride, and so were able to act with high morals (Jeffrey 6). These publicists declared the male public sphere as dangerous, and the home as a place of privacy and quiet that they could provide for their husbands (Jeffrey 6). But they were also responsible for “communicating moral and cultural values, too often forgotten in the workplace, to their families” (Jeffrey 6). It was woman’s civic duty to train her children to maintain social and moral values, ultimately meaning they were responsible for the moral welfare of the nation (Jeffrey 6).

These roles for nineteenth-century American women are defined by Barbara Welter as the “cult of True Womanhood.” Identity for young women was formed through the agencies of family, church, school, and in written forms such as literature, medical texts and etiquette manuals (Welter 3). All of these served to train a young girl for the ultimate goals of becoming wife and mother, and both goals required that she be more religious, modest, passive, submissive and domestic than men (Welter 4). She was to guard the home and family from a rapidly changing, materialistic society; she was to be supportive of her husband’s efforts, and she was, above all, not to complain (Myres 6). She was to be strong and be an example to all, but only in the private sphere, not the public (Myres 6).

This was the idealized nineteenth-century woman, an ideal to be striven for by all women, but only perhaps fully achieved by middle and upper class women (Myres 7). Many farm women worked hard in the fields, helping their
husbands exchange produce for goods; these women's roles were economically essential. Many city working class women labored in factories or worked otherwise outside the home to help support their families (Myres 7).

Despite this variety of conduct for women, the standards for proper conduct helped establish a behavioral context for those trying to uphold the standard as well as those breaking from it. This context "shaped personality and colored expectations. For many women, the cult of domesticity provided a psychologically compelling meaning for their lives" (Jeffrey 10).

With the growth of western migration, these roles were threatened. Going on this journey constituted for the travelers a "liminal" state (Turner 95), where they were traveling "betwixt and between" the civilized East and an unknown West. Not only were the companies traveling betwixt and between civilization and the unknown, but so also were the roles of the women and men. The family had to work together again to be self-sufficient on the trails, thus women regained their economic value in the community of travelers (Jeffrey 11). While traveling west then, women could maintain the role of the morally superior force that would shape and civilize the West, as well as the able and strong force that would reclaim her status in the economic realm.

II. Historical & Rhetorical Context

Historical context
The Journey

Prior to the mass emigrations, missionaries, trappers, and explorers were the only whites who had ventured west (Schlissel Women's Diaries 19 and
Unruh 59). Their reports of beautiful weather, fertile land, and unending health for the dwellers of these lands were irresistible to Easterners weary of failed crops, cold weather, and illness (Unruh 60). This virtual paradise was replete with tall tales and legends. Oregon pigs “roamed about pre-cooked with knives and forks sticking out for the benefit of anyone who might be hungry” (Unruh 92). There was also a “250-year-old Californian who discovered he had to move out of that healthy region when he wanted to die. But when his body was returned to California for burial the salutary climate immediately restored him to robust health” (Unruh 92). These were persuasive images of a land that would provide for them.

Aside from the appeal of these exaggerated reports, one major factor in the appeal of the West was the prolonged depression that began in 1837. Banks closed that year and by 1839 wages fell 30 to 50 percent (Schlissel Women's Diaries 19). Reports of the fertile country out west prompted the formation of emigration societies desirous of enrolling members for the long trek. In 1841, sixty members of the Western Emigration Society went west (National Park Service 30). This trickle of emigrants pushed the federal government into active assertion of American rights in the western territories. In 1841, Senator Linn of Missouri introduced bills that would extend American laws into the West and that would give 640 acres to every male and 160 acres each to his wife and children (National Park Service 30). The thought of rich, free land lured emigrants from their eastern homes.

By 1843, the Oregon Territory was drawing an abundance of families. The majority of emigrants undertook a journey by covered wagon, which was
generally a six-month, 2,400-mile endeavor (Schlissel Women’s Diaries 10). Young single men and young families were the most frequent travelers, and they came mostly from Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, although quite a few came from farther east. They started from towns just east of the Missouri River, such as St. Joseph, Missouri or Council Bluffs, Iowa. These towns came to be known as “jumping off places” (Schlissel Women’s Diaries 10); literally and figuratively, these people were jumping from a familiar place into a place in which they had little idea of their fate.

Loaded with supplies and joining a company with elected leaders, the emigrants started on their journey, following the Platte River across Nebraska and Wyoming, through the Rocky Mountains at South Pass, then north along the Snake River across Idaho into Oregon. The final destination was the Willamette Valley in western Oregon. Those going to California went north around the Great Salt Lake and then south along the Humboldt and Truckee Rivers, over the Sierra Nevada Mountains and into Sacramento (National Park Service 90). Along the way, emigrants met with many other travelers; in fact, the trails became quite crowded during certain years, such as 1849, and at certain places, such as river crossings (Hill xxiv-xxv). There were also landmarks, such as Independence Rock, and forts, such as Laramie, that were mentioned in most diaries (Hill xxvii). The emigrants experienced severe heat, dust storms, rain storms, drought, cold, disease, death, Indians, and loss of material items (Schlissel Women’s Diaries 11).

Over the years, the trail changed. The first emigrants to travel in the 1840’s found the trail somewhat uncrowded by other pioneers. The gold rush of
1849 drew thousands of emigrants eager to make their fortunes. By 1851, wagon parties were larger, traveling with herds of sheep and cattle (Schlissel Women's Diaries 76). The trail had become a commercial road by 1852 and 1853, years in which the trail was crowded with emigrants and traders. During the Civil War, men were called upon to fight, and emigration dwindled. Many of the forts were emptied of soldiers and volunteers watched over the forts (Schlissel Women's Diaries 130). Of the emigrants that did go west, many went to escape the war. Adaline Scoville's husband "was not anxious to go to war, and he said he should catch the draft for sure, and he did not like war, so we sold to good advantage" (Allen 4). Abuse of southern sympathizers in Missouri drove Arabella Fulton's slave-owning family west (Allen 4). But the conflict between the North and South before and during the Civil War was also a presence in the West. One of the frequently asked questions of California was whether it would be slave or free. When war began, emotions ran high and caused tension in the West. Nancy Jane Fenn McPherson relates this sad story of how deep opposition affected pioneer relationships:

When I was 15 I married William Angus McPherson. We named our first baby William Green McPherson--William for his father and Green for Green McDonald, my husband's closest and dearest friend. They loved each other like brothers. Green used to stop at our house at noon whenever he could and take dinner with us. He was strongly southern and believed slavery was a divine institution. My husband was a strong Union man. That was one subject they avoided.
One day Green drove up to our house, looking more serious than usual. He put up his team and came in. He and Angus sat down to dinner. I had a particularly good dinner that day. Green said, “Fort Sumter has been fired on. The South is no longer submitting to interference with its institutions by the North. I suppose you will hold with the North, Angus.”

My husband nodded.

Green said, “I am for the South. If it comes to war here in Oregon, we shall be on opposite sides. I am willing to shoot the other Yankees, but I am going to fire over your head, Angus. I couldn’t stain my hands with your blood.”

Green and my husband arose, and my husband extended his hand across the table and said, “We have come to the parting of the ways. Goodbye old friend.” They shook hands and left the table.

I begged them to sit down and eat a last meal together, but they were too deeply moved. For the next 30 years they met each other without a sign of recognition. They never spoke again (Lockley 27-28).

It is said that the Civil War pitted brother against brother, and in Nancy McPherson’s story she includes that idea by saying that the two men had loved each other like brothers. This story demonstrates the conviction people felt, one way or another, even though the actual battles were being fought more than 2,000 miles away.
Emigrant fear

Two tragic incidents that created the "standard" for pioneers' fears of the West were the Whitman massacre and the fate of the Donner party. These events encompassed what the Indians were capable of and what the elements and misinformation could do to a party of emigrants. Dr. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman crossed the continent in the spring of 1836 with Henry and Eliza Spalding, proving that women and wagons could make the long journey (Ross 27, 43). Their mission was to bring Christianity to the Indians. Once in Oregon, Marcus and Narcissa settled at Waiilatpu among the Cayuse; the Spaldings were 120 miles away at Lapwai among the Nez Perce (Ross 33). A year later, the Whitmans were joined by four young married people, also dedicated to "saving" the Indians (Ross 37). During the first two years in the mission, Narcissa had a child who drowned in a stream and she never had another. She did, however, adopt eleven children, seven of whom were the Sager family, orphaned on the overland journey (Ross 41).

As more and more emigrants came, so did more trouble occur with the Indians, not only because the pioneers were settling their lands, but they were bringing disease. By the winter of 1847, relations between the Indians and the Whitmans were strained. There was a measles epidemic which was fatal to the Indians, but did not seem to be killing the whites, who had a natural immunity established in their blood (Ross 46). The Indians began to believe that Dr. Whitman was plotting against them, failing to cure them on purpose (Ross 46).
November 29, 1847, was a fateful day for the Whitmans. Years later, Elizabeth Sager Helm, one of the seven adopted Sager children, told Fred Lockley, an Oregon journalist, her story of the massacre:

Mary Ann Bridger, the half-breed daughter of Jim Bridger the scout, was working in the kitchen. Two Indians, Telekaut and Tamsuky, came to the kitchen door and, walked into the kitchen, shutting the door into the next room, where Mrs. Whitman was feeding my sister, Henrietta. My brother, John Sager, was sitting in the kitchen winding some twine. The two Indians began talking to Dr. Whitman.

Mary Ann told me that Telekaut was the one who killed Dr. Whitman and that Tamsuky shot and killed my brother. Mary Ann jumped behind the stove and then, running around the side of the house, came and told Mrs. Whitman that the Indians were killing Dr. Whitman. . .

Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Hall brought Dr. Whitman into the sitting room. . .Mrs. Whitman went to the fireplace to get some ashes to stop the bleeding in the doctor’s head where he had been struck with a tomahawk. Looking out of the window I saw the Indians shooting and I said, 'Mother, they are killing Mr. Saunders'. . .Mrs. Whitman came to the door and looked out.

An Indian that we call Frank was standing on the schoolroom step and, seeing Mrs. Whitman looking out, shot at her, the bullet striking her in the shoulder. My sister, Katie,
stooped over Mrs. Whitman, who had fallen to the floor, and tried to help her up. . .

Dusk came early and as the Indians began breaking the windows, Mrs. Whitman thought we had better go upstairs to Miss Bewley's room. . .

The Indians broke into the house and mutilated Dr. Whitman and my brother. The Indians then broke the door to the upstairs room and Tamsuky called to Mr. Rogers to come on down, that he would take care of us. . .

Finally, Mr. Rogers went downstairs and talked to Tamsuky and Joe Lewis [apparently an Anglo name for one of the Indians]. Tamsuky told Mr. Rogers that the Indians were going to burn the house and that he wanted to save Mrs. Whitman and the others. . .

Mrs. Whitman was so weak from loss of blood that she lay down on the sofa. . . Joe Lewis put his gun by the kitchen door and took the foot of the sofa to help carry Mrs. Whitman out. . .

They carried Mrs. Whitman on the sofa, through the kitchen door. Just before they had gone out, one of the Indians told my brother, Francis, to go along with Mrs. Whitman. As we went out of the kitchen, Joe Lewis dropped his end of the sofa, on which Mrs. Whitman was lying and at the same time the Indians standing around fired. Mr. Rogers raised his hands and said, 'Oh my God,' and fell. My brother also fell and Mrs. Whitman, who was shot
through the cheek and through the body, fell off of the lounge and onto the muddy ground.

...I ran back into the house. I saw my brother fall and also Mr. Rogers, and I saw Mrs. Whitman roll off the lounge on which they were carrying her and fall on the muddy ground. My sister Mathilda also saw the killing of these three. She said she saw one of the Indians reach down, catch Mrs. Whitman by the hair, and raise her head and then strike her across the face several times with his leather quirt (Lockley 53-60).

The Indians stopped killing and held everyone captive until they were rescued and brought to Fort Vancouver. The Indians were eventually tried for their crimes and hanged in Oregon City (Lockley 60).

The horror of this account reached emigrants’ ears and instilled fear and hatred in the emigrants. To people in those days, the whites were only trying to better the Indians’ lives and the result was murder, though, from a late twentieth century scholarly perspective, the whites should have left the Indians alone in the first place. Still, the account of the massacre from one of its victim’s own lips is quite chilling, and the fear understandable in perspective of the times.

In the same year, a horror story of a different kind occurred. In the spring of 1846, George and Jacob Donner and their families and James Frazier Reed and his family left Independence, Missouri for California in high spirits. Reed was already a wealthy businessman and hoped to do even better in California. His wagon was the epitome of extravagance. It was a double-decker with a
built-in stove, spring cushion sheets, and comfortable bunks. It took eight yoke of oxen to pull it.

That spring in Independence, talk was everywhere about Lansford Hastings’ cutoff. Hastings was a 27 year old lawyer from Mt. Vernon, Ohio who had gone west in 1842. He had visions of making California an independent country with himself at the head, and so set about trying to get people to come to California. He advertised a cutoff to the great Salt Lake that would supposedly save emigrants approximately 350 miles; however, he himself had never traveled the cutoff. As it turned out, it was virtually impassable because of the canyons and the trees.

With promise of the savings the cutoff would afford, Jacob Donner carried Hastings’ guide with him. At about the same time the Donner Party left for the West, Hastings was preparing to come East, via his new route to see what it was like. The Donners and the Reeds had little trouble for the first leg of the journey. By the time they got to Fort Laramie on June 27, they were a week behind schedule. One of the biggest fears of the emigrants at the time was that they would be caught in the snow in the Sierra Nevada Mountains if they started too late or fell behind, so the party, especially James Reed, was anxious to take the cutoff and make up some time. While at Laramie, he happened to meet up with a man named Clyman, whom he knew from Illinois, who had just come with Hastings through the cutoff. Clyman told the party not to take it, and that it was barely passable on foot, let alone with wagons. But Reed was anxious about time and decided to take it anyway.
On July 17, a horseman came along bearing a message from Hastings. The wagons were to continue to Fort Bridger where Hastings would escort them over the new trail. On July 20, when the emigrants reached Little Sandy River, many followed the advice to take the regular trail. But the Donner party and a few others decided to take the route to Fort Bridger to meet up with Hastings. However, by the time they got to Fort Bridger, they found that Hastings had already started, but left instructions for people to follow.

The cutoff ended up taking one month rather than one week, and they still had 600 miles to go. By October, they were caught in the Sierra Nevadas in the first snowfall of what was to be the worst winter ever recorded. They began building a winter camp—makeshift cabins with hides for roofs. By mid-December, barely any meat was left in the camp, and by February the survivors had resorted to the unthinkable: cannibalism. The first of the relief party arrived February 19, 1847, and they found a horrible sight.

All of the Reeds survived, but all the adult Donners and four of their children did not. News spread quickly of this disaster. Newspapers back East printed every word of every diary and letter they could get their hands on. They even stretched the truth by depicting the men and women as growing to enjoy their cannibalism. Emigration fell off until 1848, when gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill ("The Donner Party" documentary on The American Experience, PBS, written and directed by Ric Burns 1992).

Both these stories became representatives of the kinds of horrors that were possible in the West; however, despite these horrors, many took their
chances and made it to California or Oregon without major trouble from the Indians or the elements.

Rhetorical context

Women’s travel writing

The overland journey evoked a plethora of personal accounts rivaled only by the Civil War. It was popular to write journals and especially travel journals at the time. In the nineteenth-century, women were beginning to experience the freedom of travel that their male counterparts had enjoyed for years. Traveling “offered the kind of adventure imaginable to them heretofore only in the Gothic or the romantic novels of the day—encounters with the exotic, with the exciting, the renewing, the inherently self-fulfilling” (Hamalian xi). But travel fulfilled more than a sense of adventure; it fulfilled a desire for improvement of oneself and others (Hamalian xi). Books of women’s traveling experiences became a popular genre of literature (Hamalian ix). Pioneer diarists certainly saw the adventure as well as their civilizing mission. There are numerous descriptions of the exotic landscape along the overland trail. Women also took “sightseeing” side trips to natural wonders like Scotts Bluffs and Soda Springs. Women and children kept diaries as did the men on these journeys; they knew they were taking part in a great historical event.

Emigrant guides

The great waves of men and women who moved west and who kept diaries of their journeys were preceded by exploration parties headed by
people like Lansford Hastings, Joel Palmer, and Andrew Child, who wrote emigrant’s guides to the West. These were carefully documented travel journals designed to offer the best routes to emigrants and to offer estimates on the kinds of provisions they would need. As demonstrated earlier, however, they were not always accurate. Still, they offered a precedent for the style in which both women and men were to write, and provided alluring descriptions which drew emigrants to the romance of the West. Their purpose was clear: to give a practical chronology of events for other emigrants to follow, not only with their footsteps but in their journals.

Lansford W. Hastings, famous (or infamous) for his guide which led the Donner party to doom, published his *Emigrant’s Guide to Oregon and California* in 1845. His intent in publishing the guide was “to give a succinct, and at the same time, practical description of those countries; embracing a brief description of their mountains, rivers, lakes, bays, harbours, islands, soil, climate, health, productions, improvements, population, government, market, trade and commerce: a description of the different routes; all necessary information relative to the equipment, supplies, and the method of travelling. . . This may, with the more propriety be hoped, as all excrescences have been cautiously lopped off, leaving scarcely anything more than a mere collection of interesting, important and practical facts” (Preface).

His party left Independence, Missouri on May 16, 1842, “all as one man, united in interest, united in feeling, we were, en route, for the long desired El Dorado of the West. . . Now, all was high glee, jocular hilarity, and happy anticipation, as we thus darted forward into the wild expanse, of the untrodden
regions of the ‘western world’" (6, italics his). It appears that Hastings knew the power of his words and their ability to create a desire within the trapper looking for an abundance of animals or the farmer whose crops were failing. By capitalizing “West,” he creates a mythic world, a Heaven for the common man, in which everyone is united and happy. Apparently, others knew the power of his words as well. In Bancroft’s History of California, the following appraisal of Hastings’ book appears: “The author was an intelligent man, with some ability as a writer; but his book was a piece of special pleading intended to attract immigrants, and accordingly all was painted in couleur de rose. Though visited in a year of extreme drought, not a single defect was pointed out in the country’s natural condition” (xxviii, emphasis his).

Hastings’ guide continues with a narrative of the journey, a history and description of nature, and advice on routes and supplies needed to make the journey. The impact his guide had was to motivate westward expansion by providing for emigrants a positive mindset for this hard journey, providing the kinds of experiences to be narrated, such as encampments, deaths, and Indians, and finally for providing words with which to narrate their experiences.

Joel Palmer began his Journal of Travels Over the Rocky Mountains on April 16th, 1845. He too was prompted by the promise the Oregon Territory held. The structure of his journal is similar to Hastings’, and it is a structure that appears regularly in emigrant diaries. Every entry is dated and tells of the day’s happenings:

April 29. We traveled about twenty-six miles, through a gently undulating country: the principal crops consisted of corn, oats,
tobacco and some wheat. We passed through Williamsburgh and Fulton. The latter town is the seat of justice for Callaway county.

April 30. We made an advance of about thirty miles through a well timbered country, and passed through Columbia, the seat of justice of Boone county. The town is pleasant and surrounded by a fertile and attractive country. We made our halt and encamped for the night, five miles westward of this town.

May 1. We started this morning at the usual hour, and after a ride of eight miles, reached and re-crossed the Missouri, at Rocheport, and continued our journey until night, passing though Booneville, the county seat of Cooper—a rich and fertile county, making in all a ride of twenty-six miles.

May 2. Passed through the town of Marshall, the seat of justice for Saline county. The town stands upon an elevated prairie, upon which may be found a few groves of shrubby timber. The country upon this [the west] side appeared to be much better supplied with water, than that upon the east side (4).

Palmer’s journal concerns itself with distances, place names and descriptions of the land vital to the emigrants’ survival on the journey. His guide continues with a table of distances and advice on supplies the emigrants needed to outfit themselves with.

Andrew Child’s New Guide for the Overland Route to California, published in 1852, focuses on distances. Rather than record the date and then the information, he inserts the miles that are between each point within the text:
From TRADERS' POINT, on the Missouri River, over a high rolling country, to 6 GROVE AND CREEK on the left of the road; to 3 CREEK--Banks high; timber enough for camping purposes. Grass abundant. 8 CREEK--steep and high banks.--Timber plenty. The creek is crossed just below the forks, on a tolerable Bridge. 4 1/2 ELK HORN FORK of the Platte river; plenty of timber about the river. Grass abundant. 8 MAIN PLATTE RIVER. The river is here wide and beautiful.-- 29 1/2 Some Cotton-wood and Willows along the bank. The bottom land is here very wide and fertile. Road here turns to right and runs 3 NEAR THE RIVER. 2 PAWNEE VILLAGE, south of river. Road lies over the bottom land, running in sight of river, to 25 SHELL CREEK (3).

Child's abbreviated language and insertion of numbers and capitalized landmarks are somewhat distracting, and any misreadings could lead to disaster for the emigrants.

Guidebooks were numerous on the trails. These guides were the road map to follow west. They told the emigrants where the best place to camp was, which was usually a place that had good water, grass for the animals and timber to build a fire and cook with.

**Popular and intellectual literature**

Because many of the diaries display the writer's education and competence in eloquence, it is necessary to discuss trends of thought and rhetoric in the nineteenth-century. Though it is impossible to say that a given
woman read all the popular literature and philosophies of the day, the general influences are there. Probably the most popular forms of literature were the ladies magazines that proliferated in the early 1800's--*Ladies Album, Portfolio, Young Ladies Journal, Ladies Mirror, Ladies Museum and Weekly Repository, Bower of Taste* (Woloch 100). Many were filled with fashion plates (Woloch 100). But Sarah Hale's *Ladies Magazine* (later *Godey's Lady's Book*) had the serious purpose of elucidating women's roles and advocating education for women. Her issues might include "A Sketch of an American Character" written to evoke patriotism. Or there might be an article on the vocation of motherhood (Woloch 101). Many essays were full of "sympathy, sentiment, and graveyard scenes" (Woloch 102).

In addition to popular literature, there was growing popularity of elegant belles lettres (Johnson 15). This element of the New Rhetoric that was being taught at universities in the nineteenth-century combines aesthetics and rhetoric (32). It said that "appeals to the imagination must be satisfied in all discourses through harmony in arrangement and the principles of style. . .Whether foregrounded in the nature of the subject, the structure of the discourse, or the devices of style, the principles of harmony, elegance, and the sublime provide the writer and speaker with the means of intensifying the response of the imagination and the higher passions and elevating the reader's or listener's apprehension of the beautiful" (Johnson 228). Many nineteenth-century writers were influenced by these principles.

In the American Romantic period in the first half of the nineteenth-century, concepts of literature changed from imitation to expression of self, of the writer's
world. Confessional literature, such as autobiographies and other expressions of the self, became popular. Also becoming popular were the works of Irving, Cooper, and other American authors. Their writings contain strong emphasis on the visual descriptions of the world, described as “the pictorial mode” by Donald Ringe. He describes this mode as “a style of writing that bears close affinities to the art of the landscape painter” (x). These writers learned that in the visual image, they could capture the imagination of the readers. Thus, if seeing mountains or prairies suggests the concept of human freedom, then the corresponding verbal image should capture that same feeling (Ringe 8).

Romantic writers were literally painting pictures with their prose. Emigrants, perhaps influenced by this pictorial mode, also wrote lengthy descriptions of the landscape, visualizing it for friends and families back home.

Francis Parkman’s work The Oregon Trail, published in 1849, was widely popular and may also have influenced the prose entries of emigrant diaries. Parkman made the journey in 1846 in order to study the Indians of the West. Emulating the pictorial mode, his account is full of lengthy descriptions of the people and sights he encountered. His description of his first glimpse of the prairie is especially romantic:

We pursued our way for some time along the narrow track, in the checkered sunshine and shadow of the woods, till at length, issuing forth into the broad light, we left behind us the farthest outskirts of that great forest, that once spread unbroken from the western plains to the shore of the Atlantic. Looking over an
intervening belt of shrubbery, we saw the green, ocean-like expanse of prairie, stretching swell over swell to the horizon (16).

Many diarists marked their first glimpse at the vast prairies with a lengthy, descriptive entry, following Parkman's pictorial style.

To Romantics writers, the landscape was more than scenery; it was a spiritual resource. Styles of writing are reflected in this romanticism. Organic forms that create a unity via rhythm, diction, image, ideas symbol, attitude, tone, setting, and character are typical in Romantic literature. According to Robert Lacour-Gayet, women in the nineteenth-century did indeed read Irving, Cooper, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Emerson (233). In their diaries, descriptions of the landscape are often romantic; some diarists even use the word "romantic" to describe them. A few speak of the divine in nature, even using the metonym of the "eye" that Emerson uses in a passage from Nature: "I become a transparent eye-ball. . ." (6). Martha Mitten Allen found references to Cooper in journals she studied: "Phoebe Judson 'was much disappointed in not finding in [the Western Indians] some of the noble traits with which Cooper characterized the red man of the forest'" (52-53). This statement is not only indication that women read and were influenced in general by literature, but it is also an indication that some of this literature enhanced their preconceived ideas of what the West would be like. Mollie Sanford makes a general reference to narrative construction of the westward journey when she comments on an incident in which her husband accidentally dipped into the bucket where she had rinsed his dirty socks after waking at night thirsty: "This is a fair example of the 'novelty' and 'romance' of the trip across the plains that one reads about. Let all try it
who are thirsting for the romantic. I just expect to find my head almost white before we get to Denver" (Allen 52). Mollie’s tongue-in-cheek response indicates that there was a generalized notion, even then, of a romanticized West, and that the realities might be far more mundane.

III. Diaries and Folklore

Historic vs. folkloric scholarship

While historians have written at length about women’s diaries of the westward journey, they are mostly concerned with the content and how closely the writer adheres to an accurate portrayal of the journey. They take many journals and create a composite narrative of the journey. This procedure, though acceptable among historians, has the regrettable consequence of sacrificing the integrity of individual women’s experiences. For example, no sooner do we get interested in one particular woman--her narrative voice, her family, her daily experiences--than we move on to the next woman, again getting interested in her, only to move to the next woman.

To bring out individual voices in these diaries, I have tried to marry content and rhetorical strategy, a strategy which historians often overlook. Elizabeth Hampsten, in “Considering More Than a Single Reader,” effectively argues about how two women historians do not look at the language used by the individual woman and what that might reveal about her. She states that Julie Roy Jeffrey, in her writing about women’s overland diaries, is more concerned with the content than with some of the literary qualities that the author employed to get her narrative across. When one diarist talks about her
husband, she uses flowery language possibly taken from sermons, romantic novels, and prescriptive writing about what love and marriage is supposed to be like (135-136). Hampsten feels that Joanna Stratton, also writing about women's overland diaries, intervenes too much--paraphrasing without interpreting (136). Hampsten talks about how these historians should have noted that when talking about plain facts the diarists often used simple sentence structures, but when more emotional, the sentences get more involved. In one case a particular woman "virtually composed her diary in two languages: one for work and business; the other for affairs of her heart" (137). Hampsten's commentary is valid. While there is a factual experience and a tradition of diary writing to record it, there is also individual creativity within the diary genre. It is important to note the content, the recurring themes, and "typical daily life" apparent in all the diaries, but it is also important to look closely at how the individual responded to and recorded all the experiences of the journey in her daily journal. These are the factors involved in the creation of identity.

Folklore scholars have also written about this period in history, but the approach is in terms of investigating culturally created truths--the vernacular record which animates the culture--rather than getting at an intellectual historical truth. Beverly Stoeltje in "A Helpmate for Man Indeed" investigates the images of the frontier woman through literature and personal accounts of the frontier. She shows how a combination of the symbolic environment (images of women carried in the minds of the pioneers) and the physical environment created a process of adaptation which in turn recreated the acceptable image of women (26). She found that there were three images of
women in the frontier West: the refined lady, the helpmate, and the bad woman, with the helpmate being the popular image of pioneer women. Barre Toelken investigates the relationship between people's experience in a particular place and their cultural expressions of the experiences. He argues that works such as Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* relies on literary statements about the Western experience, avoiding the "vernacular record provided by folklore" (17). He also finds Smith's work problematic because evidence of the western experiences provided by folklore "Often stands in direct contradiction to the intellectual observations of the distant scholar" (17). Toelken's work emphasizes the vernacular record--legends, songs--and what they can tell us about how the pioneers shaped their experiences. Michaele Thurgood Haynes, in "Calicoes or Corsets? An Analysis of the Clothing Worn on the Frontier" (unpublished manuscript) explores the conflicting identities of women in the West by examining the clothing worn by frontier women. Most pioneer women are depicted as wearing calicoes and sensible clothes for the environment; however, many women kept up with the fashions of the East. The move West created confusion about women's roles. Haynes' thesis is that the insistence on wearing fashionable clothes was a conflict-resolver: the clothes were a cultural marker of the East, but they were also markers of the feminine gender, keeping women's roles somewhat intact. Here again, Haynes relies on the "vernacular record" rather than on romanticized images; similarly, I use a number of pioneer women's diaries as vernacular records to investigate women's roles and responses on the overland trails in order to elaborate on the historical record.
Personal experience narratives and diaries

Personal narrative theory

Though the diaries are written documents, they are stories of personal experience, and the scholarship on personal narrative is beneficial to the interpretation of the diaries. The scholarship helps to solve the reader's sense of aesthetic differences between the diary and the oral narrative. These differences manifest themselves in the audience, who expects a "good story." An oral narrative at the outset may more readily lend itself to the concept of a good story than does a diary, but if a diary can be read as a narrative, then the audience can appreciate its immediacy and its ability to communicate meaning. It could then be considered a good story.

The study of personal experience narratives has undergone a vast amount of revision due to the changing definitions of the genre and the development of new concepts in folklore such as the performance-centered approach. Landmark research on personal experience narratives in America was first done from a linguistic standpoint by William Labov. It was introduced into folklore in America by Sandra K.D. Stahl and has continued to burgeon in folkloric studies. In order to obtain an understanding of personal experience narratives and the significant scholarship in folklore it is necessary to start with a summary of Labov's general framework of oral narrative. This is a framework I implement in analyzing individual diaries.

In Language in the Inner City, William Labov offers a structural model of what he considers the components for a good story. The sequences of action are important to the story, and if they are reversed, "the inferred temporal
sequence of the original semantic interpretation is altered" (360). According to Labov, all narratives need to contain at least complicating action and resolution since this is where the temporal sequence and closing off of the “reportable” portion of the teller’s experience is located (363). The “means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative” (366) is the evaluative element in narratives, without which the teller might be met with “so what?” (366). The evaluation explains that the story is reportable, and Labov claims the reportability of the experience is controlled by that which is “strange, uncommon, or unusual” (371). Passing the “so what?” test has an important influence on the American view of what a good story is, as well as setting up a rule for that which is reportable in a story. This model assumes that the teller knows the end of the story and has interpreted the meaning in her life whereas in diaries, the teller does not know the ending until she gets there. Though Labov’s model and most models for studying narrative are based on completed narratives, his model is useful because he identifies a component, the evaluation, that is found throughout the narrative. In Labov’s use of the term, the evaluation serves the speaker as a way to maintain the floor while talking and the story must pass the “so what?” test in order for the narrator to maintain the floor. In the diaries, however, diarists are not as concerned with an audience reaction of “so what?,“ (the unusual nature of the journey answers that question) so the evaluation serves to make a point about the identity and responses of the writer. In his work, too, Labov gives an example of the evaluative component contributing to an overall point about the identity of the teller, in this case a boy tells a story in which “almost every element of the
syntax contributes to the point, and the point is self-aggrandizement” (363). This boy presents an identity as a “good boy” (363).

Similarly, Dell Hymes’ model for understanding speech communities is useful for understanding the context in which the diaries and reminiscences were written as well as the context in which they are read. He begins by naming the community who shares “rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety” the speech community (54). He defines speech situation as a recognizably bounded situation “associated with (or marked by the absence of) speech” (ceremonies, meals are speech situations) (56). A speech event is “restricted to activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech” (a conversation at a party is a speech event) (56). A speech act is the smallest term of a speech event, on a level different from the sentence. It could be a story within conversation (56-7). The terms “narrative event” and “narrated event” for speech event and speech act, respectively, have also been used to describe these linguistic situations. In terms of overland diaries, except for the reminiscences, there is little distance between the narrative event and the narrated event. It is this immediacy that provides some of the interest that may otherwise make these “bad stories.” There is, however, a great distance between the narrated event and the narrative event of my reading the diaries. This distance also provides narrative interest because I am situated in a completely different time, eager to make sense of these artifacts. A peculiarity about the immediacy of the text is the reader’s knowledge that the author did not know the end of the story she was writing. The diarist had no idea
whether she would be killed by Indians, or starve to death like most of the Donner party. All other literature--fiction, personal experience narrative, autobiography, and reminiscence--points toward the end of the story in the beginning. The only ending these diarists have is the hope for the ending--finding a home and prosperity in California or Oregon.

I found parallels of the "everydayness" of diaries to the "everydayness" of personal experience narratives which Sandra K.D. Stahl investigated in her article "The Personal Narrative as Folklore." In the introduction to a special issue of the Journal of the Folklore Institute, she defines the personal experience narrative as "a true story, a personal experience endured, performed, witnessed, remembered, and cast into story form by the teller himself" (6). To render the narratives as folkloric, she explores the concepts of tradition and innovation. Innovation is seen as thought or behavior that is new because it is different from existing forms, and is often thought of as non-traditional (10). But once innovation is repeated, it becomes tradition. Conversely, everything is somewhat innovative because no two things are ever exactly alike (10). The word tradition implies a fixity in which there is no change or innovation. Hence, Stahl says that tradition must be thought of as a function of time--in other words, encompass not only the past, but the present and the future as well (10). This relates to Barre Toelken’s concept of the "tradition-based" (42); the dynamics of tradition contain the possibility of innovation. Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin also take up the tradition/innovation debate. Their analyses of national and ethnic identification in Quebec and Hawaii resulted in the argument that "tradition cannot be defined in terms of
boundedness, givenness, or essence. Rather, tradition refers to an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity" (273). For diary writers, the diary is a type of personal narrative that, though written in the diarist's present, it is informed by both traditional and innovative structures; hence diaries could be considered folkloric expressions.

Stahl's studies of personal narrative have helped to widen the definition of tradition and thus folklore to involve any collective aspects of a folkgroup, not just text, including function, theme, pattern of response, traditional attitudes, or process of composition (Stahl, "Personal Narrative as Folklore" 13). According to Stahl, these are essential qualities, and in describing performance in light of these essences she says: "A performance can be folkloric only if it develops from unexamined traditional resources, resources accepted by the performer as givens, as essences" (13). Though seemingly non-traditional in textual content, personal experience narratives, seen in the greater context of the culture from which the teller comes, can be seen as traditional. The essential aspects of an individual performer, combined with artistry and interpersonal contact, make up a folk performance (Stahl, "Personal Narrative as Folklore" 13). These women's diaries may seem to part from traditional categories of narrative, but as demonstrated earlier, they are part of a tradition of travel journal writing, and the ideologies encompassed in the diaries are traditional to the United States.

Stahl's work has helped to shift the focus in folklore from text to context to include personal experience narratives. This means that interpretation is not bounded or informed only by the text. This shift in focus is also useful in trying to interpret significance and meaning in the diaries of the overland trail. In order to
analyze and interpret folklore, mere collection of texts out of context becomes methodologically unsound. Alan Dundes suggests in his article, "Texture, Text and Context," that in order to define genres of folklore and analyze any given item of folklore, context and texture as well as text must be explored, ideally all together, to explain WHY a particular text is used in a particular situation" (24--emphasis his). Robert Georges in "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events' takes this "ideal," and develops a model for storytelling events in which he adopts a holistic rather than atomistic approach. He calls these events "complex communicative events" (316), and "To isolate any one aspect of a storytelling event (for example, that part of the message communicated by the linguistic code) and to disregard or consider as subordinate or incidental all other aspects of a storytelling event is to give that one aspect an independence and a primacy it simply does not have" (317). Concerning women's diaries of the overland trail, much of what makes them into "good stories" is interpreting them within their historical and rhetorical context and my own.

In order to take into account the contexts within which these diaries were written and within which I read them, Richard Bauman's performance approach is extremely helpful. The approach provides specific keys to performance which point to differing contexts, aiding in interpretation of what is being communicated to an audience. Bauman's work marks a turning point in folklore scholarship. He introduced the performance-centered approach which explores the concept of performance as "the key to the real integration between people and lore on the empirical level" (33). In order to do this, folklorists must capture the performance in context, and thus ensure the "integration of folklore
with people at its very source, in performance” (Bauman, “Differential Identities and the Social Base of Folklore” 33). In a more complete work, Verbal Art as Performance (1977), Bauman constructs a framework for the performance-centered approach to folklore. In order for members of a communicative interaction to be able to interpret the messages being communicated, the frame of performance offers “keys” (Bauman 15) or “culturally conventionalized metacomunication” (Bauman, 16). (See also Barbara Babcock on metanarration, same volume.) These consist of special codes, figurative language, parallelism, special paralinguistic features, special formulae, appeal to tradition, and disclaimer of performance (Bauman 16). Though I obviously could not witness the performance situation in which these diaries were written, I have tried to recreate and imagine it, and I found that many diaries as well as reminiscences contain the kinds of metacomunication Bauman names.

Performance connotes a performer/audience relationship between speaker/listener, and therefore implies a certain consciousness on the part of the speaker about how s/he is narrating the event. Many studies done by performance-centered researchers are about people who are considered to be “good story-tellers,” hence conscious of their art. Bauman, in Story, Performance, and Event, studies what he calls traditional oral narratives of “classic genres” (6) collected in context from older men in Texas. He acknowledges that he favors “male expressive traditions” but with the new perspective of the performance-centered approach (6). However, in order to broaden the use of performance from just good storytellers who tell stories in traditionally male situations and genres, many studies have been done on
conversation narrative, or personal experience narratives that often occur in
everyday, non-narrative conversational speech events (Wolfson 1982, Tannen
1984, Polanyi 1985, Young 1987). Interrupting the ongoing travel experience to
record it could be seen as a (deferred) conversational speech event in which
ostensibly the intended audience was small, familiar, and private, though
eventually many were published making the audience large, public, and
unknown.

Livia Polanyi provides discussion of conversational narrative as cultural
texts which reveal the teller's world view. In her work on American
conversational storytelling, she seeks to analyze oral narratives structurally and
culturally. She illuminates that what the story is “about” is more complex than
“this and that.” The importance of elements in a story is “made not by naming
elements themselves, but by understanding the importance of those elements to
the point which the teller is making in telling the story” (2). She paraphrases the
narrative by finding the heavily foregrounded elements, and discusses the
narrative in terms of its structure and context, the “norms of proper social
interaction” (43). She expands her discussion into one of basic American
values and beliefs, by asking “what is most interesting, storyworthy, or
compelling about the propositions themselves” (2). In her closing chapters she
moves from the narratives as cultural texts to the teller’s “system of notions,
ideas, concepts, and values which taken together form our common world view”
(109). Though she takes her narratives from white, middle class, American
born, English-speaking friends, she admits that she does. She does not
pretend to dislocate herself; she uses herself as an informant as well. Her work
is important in that it demonstrates how complex socially situated talk is and that storytelling structures are particularly culture-bound. She also presents the importance of the researcher’s reflexivity. Upon initially reading diaries, they do seem to be about the “this and that” (minutiae) of the journey. The point is revealed in how a particular woman dealt with experiences that were unfamiliar to her, revealing values that are specifically informed by Eastern popular, social, and religious values. In the conclusion to this dissertation I discuss how these values were also politically charged and used to justify displacing and destroying Native American tribes.

Another important concept for moving between diary contexts and interpreting meaning is the concept of framing. Katherine Young borrows Erving Goffman’s concept of framing as a means for interpretation to talk about different realms within conversation and our movement in and out of these realms. She approaches narrative as one realm or enclave in conversation (15). She says that structures that are traditionally built into language can be seen as pointing outward toward intelligibility and meaning (15). She also says “the lodgement of stories in speaking situations returns attention to the mutuality of their construction, shifting interest from monologue to dialogue” (15). She explores the mutual construction of taleworlds and storyrealms in conversation through thirty-three stories told in an evening’s conversation at a Devonshire, England farm, investigating the framing characteristics of these stories, defining frames as meta-communications which “set the realm status of or disclose an attitude toward either Taleworlds or Storyrealms. Story frames distinguish stories from other discursive events . . .” (32-3). Frames are important in
studying women's diaries of the overland trail. They reveal attitudes toward the journey that are key to communicating the meaning of the diary and the diarist's identity. This is also where the deferral of the speech event comes in. The immediate context of the journey, which could be seen as the storyrealm, also involves the taleworld of the Eastern listeners brought into the storyrealm. But it is clear that the journey is the story, not home in the East. None of them chooses to speak at length of what was left behind.

The context from which the hearer of the narrative comes has gained importance in recent years, and is particularly important for reading women's diaries of the overland trail. Sandra Dolby Stahl, furthering her studies of personal experience narratives, draws on folkloristic performance theory, deconstructive criticism, and reader-response theory in order to examine oral personal experience narratives. She calls her study *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* and in it identifies "the many private or collective traditions that function as meaningful allusions in the reader or listener's interpretation of a literary or folkloric text" (1). She gives equal significance to the hearer as to the teller, asserting that the "process of hearing the text is a creative act in which the listener's own large store of cultural and personal resources is used to produce a unified resonance of meaning" (2). Armed with this rationale, she is able to move beyond analyses that attend to questions of form, structure, style, or function into a holistic, subjective perspective (10). She moves the study of personal narrative from focus on the performer into the realm of interpretation by the listener. This subjective perspective is an interpretation which must be accompanied by "personal information that sparks a given focus,
personal associations or situations that encourage the interpreter to interpret
the performance or text one way rather than another" (30). Her study focuses
the goals of personal narrative research toward research which demonstrates
"a continuity or collectivity that can reassure us all that we are each individually
connected to the generations of humanity born in the distant past or living even
now in unfathomable numbers" (120). Stahl’s argument is particularly relevant
to this study. My place in constructing and interpreting these women’s lives is
important, especially since these women cannot speak for themselves in my
world. My speaking for them firmly connects me to this past generation of
women, so much so that I feel I know them. During the course of this research I
even got to calling them “my women,” which indicates again my knowledge of
the authority I am claiming over these women in order to write about them.

*Women’s personal experience narratives and diaries*

Many historians have claimed similarities or differences in men’s and
women’s diaries of the trails as underlying bases for their arguments. John
Mack Faragher claims that there is little difference, whereas Lillian Schlissel
claims major differences. Studies in women’s folklore have found distinctions
between men’s and women’s accounts of personal experiences. Sandra Stahl
has introduced the notion of self- and other-oriented narrators (“Personal
Experience Stories” 270); Margaret Yocom has explored these characteristics
as differences between male and female storytellers. She concludes in her
study that male tellers tell for entertainment and competition, while females tell
as a mode of social interaction (45-52). Karen Baldwin has explored
storytelling at a family gathering, finding that male storytellers dramatize action, plot, and chronology of events, while women describe background details, not always with a definable beginning or end (149-161). Yet, these major distinctions appear to be absent in men's and women's diaries. The structure of the diary allows for dramatizing action as well as describing daily life and the environment. Both men and women told stories as well as gave descriptions of things encountered; however, there are more variations in terms of whether or not a woman was reluctant to make the journey. Reluctance could be gauged by how the narrator framed her diary or by particular topics she repeatedly referred to.

Degree of reluctance or willingness to travel could also be ascertained through strategies of coding, women's expressive behavior explored by Joan N. Radner. Women and other oppressed groups often use these codes to communicate the metamessage to an audience. This coding is “a set of signals--words, forms, behaviors, signifiers of some kind--that protect the creator from the consequences of openly expressing particular messages” (Radner 3). These signals are appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection (metaphor, impersonation, hedging), trivialization, and incompetence. Coding can be explicit or implicit. If it is implicit, then the intention of the performer must be inferred based on the “understanding of the conventions for aesthetic production in a given cultural circumstance” (7). We as interpreters can interpret coding based on the performance context (7). This is a useful theory to apply to women's personal experience narratives, since women's expressive behavior is influenced by the dominant culture, a culture in which the public
sphere, self-orientation, and competition are highly prized. Since women primarily belong to the inner sphere, often define themselves in terms of others, and collaborate more than compete, their narratives often reflect a conflict between the masculine and feminine realms. Identifying strategies of coding and their use is a way to show that the feminine voice is a valid and powerful one in our society. In the diaries, a major instance of coding is the systematic recording of graves. This coding may not necessarily subvert the dominant culture (which is what Radner asserts coding does) but it does subvert an emotional response, one that if expressed could result in paralysis by fear. This would make traveling even harder than it already was.

**Reading as performance context and self-reflexive activity**

All of the latter studies mentioned above place great emphasis on the “hearer” of the folkloric expression as well as the teller. It is a shame that we cannot actually hear the voices tell these narratives; we have only the written documents. This epitomizes the problem folklorists have with working with historical documents. We are trained in speaking with people about their expressive communication, focusing on individuals or communities and their crafts, whether it is basketmaking or storytelling. We are interested in what has influenced them, what individual and collective identity they put forth, and how that changes with each audience. We also include ourselves in the analysis to create a polyvocal story. In other words, we are interested in the immediate performance context. When the folk are dead, it is harder to piece together the
immediate context and we have to assert ourselves more in order to interpret
the significance of the folklore.

Along with Mark E. Workman, I consider reading a performance situation.
His work supports arguments I have already made about the usefulness of oral
models for interpreting written texts. In "Reading: A Folkloristic Activity,"
Workman investigates the idea that reading is a kind of interaction similar to the
kind of interaction in oral performance situations (1). Workman refutes Walter
Ong's contention that "written communication necessitates the assumption of
roles on the part of its audiences to a far greater extent than any required by
oral communication" (1). Ong refers to "masks" which oral interaction removes
(1). But, according to Workman, what Ong fails to realize is that even in oral
situations, the performances are highly connotative: "what folk groups provide,
therefore, is exactly that which Ong implies they do not: a mask or persona,
albeit one which is communally defined" (1). Workman concludes that there is
more similarity in written and oral communication than difference because in
oral performance situations, the folk narrative "makes the same kinds of
imaginative demands on its audience that literature makes on its readers" (1).
The formal devices are similar as well (1).

Continuing to refute boundaries between listening to oral performances
and reading a literary text, Workman notes that Ong and Paul Ricoeur assume
that in literature "a reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him"
(Workman quoting Ong 4). But this assumes that the reader, however willing to
be cast in a particular role, is a tabula rasa "on whom the text imperiously
records its designs" (4). Though literature may transcend the time period in
which it was created, it is retrieved from this timeless when it is “introduced into an interpretive environment by an admiring or critical, but in some way interested, reader” (4). In other words, both oral and written literature is communicated in a historically situated moment, to listeners and readers who are constituted by history and culture (4). Thus “the critics’ taxonomies are mythologies, his descriptions evaluations, but they are none the worse for that” (Workman quoting Walter Benn Michaels 4). He concludes by saying we “localize meaning according to our own experience of folkgroups; and we will universalize meaning--psychologically, culturally, archetypally--based on our allegiances to these or various other interpretive frameworks which are available in the world of scholarship” (5). My scholarly background has influenced the way I view any texts as well as these overland diaries; I was trained in the twentieth century in literary and folkloric interpretation of texts, not in historical accuracy. I therefore look for diarists’ uses of keys to performance to provide a window into their world view. I look for metaphors and symbols. In other words, I look at the kinds of language used to describe their westering experience and their response to it.

IV. Diaries: Function, Structure, Theme, Style, Identity

Upon close analysis of women’s overland trail diaries, I found they share some common patterns. Functionally, they are a record of occurrences of the trail and a kind of family history. Structurally, they follow a diurnal pattern, starting with the beginning of the journey, and ending, for the most part, with the completion of the journey in either California or Oregon. Thematically, they are
concerned with general maintenance of the basic needs in life, religion, landscape and with the social configuration necessary to sustain order on the ever changing trail.

**Function**

The twentieth century view that a diary is private and secret is a relatively recent development (Culley 3). Diaries were, in the 19th century, “semi-public documents intended to be read by an audience” (Culley 3). Margo Culley maintains that “women diarists in particular wrote as family and community historians. They recorded in exquisite detail the births, deaths, illnesses, visits, travel, marriages, work, and unusual occurrences that made up the fabric of their lives. Women . . . used journals to maintain kin and community networks. The diaries kept by those women functioned as extended letters often actually sent to those left behind” (Culley 4). This is also true of the particular group of women’s diaries in this study. At the time these women were travelling, it was quite probable that they might not again see the family, friends or lands they left behind. They were being uprooted at a fairly young age to accompany their husbands west. Part of the way they accomplished maintaining ties with friends and families left behind was by writing a diary of the trip. Since they were most often on the open prairie, without a post office in sight, they could not always send letters, so the diaries not only served as a way of recording the family history, but also as a means for communicating responses to the westering experience for friends and family.
Structure

The recording of daily surroundings and happenings provided the structure for the diaries. What interested me first about these diaries is probably precisely what has made them overlooked as documents worthy of study; they record the minutiae of everyday life on the trail. But everyday concerns were constantly changing on the trail, and the details were important for survival. Women did not know if there would be wood for fires or what kind of meal they could glean from the last of the salted down meats. Foods considered as waste back east, such as potato peelings, were now an important part of the diet (Luchetti, *Home on the Range* 39). Coffee was often made from the scrapings of burnt toast.

Each journal begins with a starting date and a starting point, much as the guide books do. “A Journey Across the Plains” by Mary Hall Jatta in 1865 begins, “Friday May 28th. Started from Nebraska City. Equipped for the Plains. Traveled 12 miles. Camped on the Weeping Water creek. The land rolling and beautiful.” Her diary continues:

Saturday May 28th. Traveled all day, distance 25 miles. Reached Platsmough about Four Oclock. Traveled along the Mo River to Platsmough. Camped on the Platte River ford. cooked our supper and slept in our tent.

Sunday May 30th. Crossed the Platte river in a small Ferry boat. travelled all day over high rolling Prairie distance about 25 miles. Camped on Buffalo Creek.
Other women kept diaries that had a little more personal voice and eloquent style but that still recorded the day they started and the geographical starting point. Mrs. Francis H. Sawyer kept a journal from May 9 to August 17, 1852:

*May 9. We left camp this morning, and soon found that our road was as hard to travel as the proverbial one that leads to Jordan. The mud was so deep and tough that our team of four mules mired down and stuck tight on two different occasions, and we were greatly delayed in having to stop and get them out. Our progress was very slow. We passed through Savannah, a small village, and went into camp one mile and a half beyond that place. We intend to travel in Missouri until we reach old Fort Kearney, where we expect to cross the Missouri river. Grass for our mules is very short here to-night. Distance traveled to-day eight miles.*

The diaries end usually with the arrival in California or Oregon. Some decide to stop writing during the journey, as they are sick or find the journey too monotonous to continue documenting.

**Themes**

Differing social values are reflected in the diaries. It seems that the categories of life on the trail that women are most concerned with concur with the concerns of the woman belonging to the “cult of True Womanhood,” and they are roughly birth, death, care of others, food matters, and religious values. Often the overland journey was undertaken while a woman was pregnant, or she got pregnant along the way. Pregnancy was not much of an excuse for
delaying the journey (Schlissel, Women's Diaries 13), and this in a time when it was prescribed that a woman be confined for eight to ten days, lest she be thought uncivilized (Welter 69). So the trails actually disrupted what defined women and how they defined themselves. Pregnancy was also something that apparently was not appropriate to talk about, even in a private journal. Often, there was no clue that a woman was even pregnant. The diary would simply reveal something like: "...when we awoke, there was a little baby boy in bed with mother" (Hixon 41). I did not come across any women revealing that their own child was born. This kind of coding reveals a culture in which matters concerning women's bodies were not to be discussed in detail. There is absolutely no mention of what women did during menstruation or how they negotiated "relieving" themselves.

Death was also quite a concern in the women's diaries. In some cases, it was not that the women expressed deep woe in their diaries about seeing so much death along the way, but the pages and pages of diary entries about how many gravestones had been seen that day is the rhetorical strategy used by these women to express the deep concern they had for death:

May 17 . . . saw two graves
May 18 There were two old graves close by saw two more at some distance saw one new grave. (Schlissel Women's Diaries 114).

After the initial announcement in the diary, the death of a family member or friend is subject to "religious prescription and linguistic restriction" such as "we must endure (trials) like good soldiers" (Schlissel Women's Diaries 103-104).
As for socialization, Abigail Malick's concern for the rowdiness of her children can sum it up: "The children . . . Are Not Like children Raised in the States . . . they have no Father And they Will Not Mind Me" (Schlissel, *Far From Home* 3).

Other themes concerned response to Indians, usually negative and fearful, companionship among women on the journey, domestic chores, and women's responses to the landscape.

**Styles or “diary-type”**

Styles expressing these patterns fall roughly into three categories: the chronicle diary, the literary self-conscious journal, and the reminiscence. These style names describe the journals in terms of how conscious writers seem to be of a reading audience, and to some extent, how conscious they are of the cultural context they are traveling in. Each of these categories could be seen as genres of writing based on the writer's intended audience and other kinds of writing which may have influenced her. Though it is impossible to determine completely the writer's intentions, there are significant differences in the way the writer chooses to write her journal. Self-consciousness is the element that helps to determine the genre and thus how that genre should be read. The log or chronicle type is the least self-conscious, meaning that the writer seems concerned with objectively writing down the facts of the journey rather than with much consciousness of how she is addressing an audience. The journal is conscious of itself as a kind of literary construction, with the author's subjective experiences written down. She is quite aware of a reading audience and thus
of how she crafts her journal. The reminiscence is the most self-conscious in terms of literary construction. The author is writing of her subjective experiences, having to recreate herself as a youth for an audience she knows is interested in stories from a frontier now gone. Other factors involved in determining the genre involve the move from immediacy of the writing and experience in the chronicles and the journals, to a great distance between the writing and the experience in the reminiscences, from minimal construction to highly constructed narratives; and from realistic to romantic construction. Styles chosen by the writer reflected an identity posited and an awareness of audience and purpose, and the varying degrees of this spectrum will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Diaries and the construction of self

Prior to the early nineteenth-century, concepts of self and identity revolved around a rational self and a self as part of a community, whether religious or secular. But by mid-nineteenth-century, with the Romantic Movement and its adherence to personal and individual distinctiveness, the concept of identity evolved (Elliot 620). This concept of individual distinctiveness along with a growing literacy among men and women thanks to floods of cheaply printed materials (Elliot 336), contributed to the sense of individual identity and the idea of inscribing oneself in text. As mentioned earlier, autobiographies and diaries became popular forms to express oneself.

The concept of identity has come to the forefront in folklore studies. In a written discussion series in Journal of American Folklore, Elliott Oring claims
that identity has been fundamental to the definition and study of folklore. He divides the term identity into "individual identity," which refers to the continuity of identity; "personal identity," which refers to "particular mental dispositions and contents, and not merely to the sense of continuity itself" (212). It is not the fact of being but the quality (212). "Collective identity" is "those aspects of personal identity that are derived from experiences and expressions common to a group" (212). He believes that "identity in some sense stands 'behind' experience" (213). It can be apprehended through behaviors, expressions, etc., but it is rooted in the psyche (213). He cites examples of different terms in the field of Folklore which point toward a concern for identity.

Barabara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett challenges his idea of a "unified, or continuous, concern with a concept of identity," and proposes that folklorists map discontinuities in identity (235). Her main concern is that Oiring claims identity as the center of folklore studies; she calls for a political analysis of the preoccupation with identity, asking: "in whose interest is it to fix identity" (237)? She feels that linking the terms in Oiring's list promotes "territory and sovereignty" and the potential end point is racialism (236). Oiring responds to her indictment of his interest in conceptualizing folklore studies in terms of identity by considering the possibilities for new, productive perspectives and programs (242). He also feels that questions of identity or difference are based on what we are asking and to what ends, and the answers demand criteria established within the frame of the question (244). In that statement, it seems that he feels misunderstood; he is not trying to fix a privileged identity as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett implies, but he is trying to say that it depends on the
concerns of the researcher and the context of the study (243). The issue of identity in folklore is a complex one which I do not intend to work out here; I would, however, like to sort out how I am using identity and self in terms of the diaries.

I use the terms identity and self interchangeably, for the most part in this dissertation. I, like Oring, have a sense that the identity of these women is somehow an umbrella term, or backdrop, and within that identity are many selves. So to use his terms, it seems that I may be linking the concepts of “individual identity” and “collective identity” when I use the term “identity,” and when I use the term “self” it refers to his description of “personal identity.” I intuit the notion of “self” as being constructed in the moment to a certain audience and with a certain self-consciousness rooted in the social context for specific purposes, and identity having more to do with the long term and rooted in the psyche and possibly in the collective. However, I do indeed see the difficulty in separating the two--identity/self can only be apprehended in performance, so the notion of a backdrop can only be an artificial one. Perhaps using the terms interchangeably could be seen (and forgiven) as linguistic evidence of the difficulty of defining these as separate terms and states of being.

Diarists on the overland journey presented a self that was witness and chronicler, but also that moved toward being the subject of the writing (Culley 7). In the journals I call “chronicles,” the chroniclers were witnesses to the overland experience, writing little about their own emotions and responses. The dominant feature of this “self-as-witness” diary is the conspicuous lack of the first person pronoun. The physical absence of “I” indicates an absence of
identity inscribed in these texts. However, the very fact of writing a diary, even a
chronicle, indicates a sense of self-worth. It indicates that the writer sees the
importance of recording her life (Culley 8) and “the writing act itself implies an
audience and this audience will be the vehicle of preserving the life record. . .”
(Culley 8). Margo Culley modifies Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” to refer to
diary keeping and the construction of identity: “I write, therefore I am.’ And will
be” (8).

Traveling west constituted a big change in women’s identities. In the
East they knew their roles and understood their society; in the move West, not
only were they traveling into physically unknown territories, but into psychically
unknown ones as well. This was an occasion which constituted a discontinuity
in identity, and a shift into a new identity. This shift was much like the shifts in
identity that marriage, motherhood and widowhood might bring about. On
occasions such as these, “keeping a life record can be an attempt to preserve
continuity seemingly broken or lost” (Culley 8). In this sense, the diary becomes
“an activity as much as a form—-a process, in the course of which a self may be
constructed” (Myerhoff, Remembered Lives 348).

In many ways, the construction of self depends on the sense of audience.
Again, in the chronicle diaries, it seems that the diarists envisioned a very broad
audience and thus presented a self that was so broad it became absent in
anticipation of the needs of the audience. In other diaries, ones I call “literary
self-conscious journals,” there is an imagined, specific audience, one which is
usually family or friends. In these instances, the diarist presents a self the
audience would recognize; one that conjures past social experiences and her

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responses to them. In reminiscences, the writer also has a specific audience in mind, whether it is a family member or a constructed "ideal" reader, and a purpose to preserve an identity for the future.

The construction of this reader influences how the diarist will write; it shapes the selection and omission of detail that will construct the self. The writer is concerned, whether consciously or not, with a "fictionalized" self and all manner of literary concerns that describe that self: themes, structure, narrative, symbol, voice, attitude, persona. These literary concerns indicate a self-as-object construction in what seems to be a self-as-subject genre; therefore, the self is always a constructed self. Positing a constructed self through performance keys and literary devices is what constitutes the point of the writer's communication and metacommunication to the audience. For example, by dwelling on the theme of the hard and muddy roads, Mrs. Francis Sawyer communicates to the reader that not only the physical journey was difficult, but the mental one as well. We see her conflict with her Eastern identity and her resistance to compromising it on a journey into uncivilized territory. She is a wealthy woman and being out on muddy roads was probably something she rarely encountered; thus she chose that metaphor to indicate the hardships of the journey. Lydia Waters posits a strong sense of her feminine power through her continual short narratives about her competence in opposition to the incompetence of the men and women around her.

The reader then, in order to interpret the performance and thus the identity of the diarist, must read these diaries as literature (Culley 17), or in folkloric terms, performance. The writer is the protagonist or performer, the
reader is the audience, and the diary is the text. Interrogating the themes, symbols and language reveal a “plot” that captures and communicates the identity the writer constructs.

V. Jumping Off

While writing this dissertation, I have felt, on numerous occasions, that I needed to travel the Oregon trail myself, but have been unable to spare the time. I did, however, travel to Independence, Missouri, which was a major “jumping off” place for the pioneers. Walking down the quiet, car-lined streets, I tried to imagine what it must have been like one hundred fifty years ago, crowded with hopeful pioneers. Traveling to Independence provided me with the motivation to “jump off” into my own scholarly journey.

Context of study

I chose to study women’s diaries and letters of the overland journey because they are an identifiable subcategory of women’s diary writing, and this is a form I wish to investigate as women’s folklore. I cannot remember a particular moment in time when I suddenly became interested in this subject; pioneer women and their lives have always been a source of fascination for me, a child who has never known a world without cars, television, mass transit, the polio vaccine, electricity, grocery stores, suburbs--the list goes on. Essentially, these women lived in a totally different world that was also America, and they lived in a time recent enough that my grandmothers and great grandmothers lived in it.
Pioneer days are part of our cultural identity, and to capture some of that identity, I have claimed my grandmother as a pioneer woman, born in 1899 in Oklahoma Territory. The fact that Oklahoma was not even a state yet was proof enough for me that she indeed was a pioneer, let alone the facts that “a neighbor woman” helped her deliver her children and she churned her own butter. The Little House on the Prairie books were also influential in embedding an appreciation of women’s pioneer experiences in lots of little girls--and women’s--lives. In general, the frontier conjures thoughts of simpler times when you ate what you could kill or grow, when the world was less crowded, and when men’s and women’s roles were more clearly defined (where men were men . . .) however false or simplistic these images are. I will discuss these images and the frontier in the concluding chapter.

I decided upon this topic in 1992 after traveling to Kansas for my grandmother’s funeral. In the car on the way home, my mother, father and I listened to an audio recording of Lillian Schlissel's Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey. I was struck by the variety of voices (not just because of being able to listen to voices dramatizing these women), concerns, and attitudes of the women making the journey. The irony was not lost on me. There I was in a car that could make the journey in less than a week, listening to women’s individual voices about a journey that took six months. This irony has essentially become my scholarly framework for these diaries: my responses to their responses to the overland trail. I was fascinated by the simplicity and beauty of what they were saying. I decided that I wanted to find out more about the women that made the journey, so, during June of 1992, I made my own
westward journey (by airplane) to the Bancroft Manuscript Library in Berkeley, California, in search of pioneer women's diaries of the westward migration.

**Particular diaries in this study**

The women in this study shared the westering experience with more than three hundred thousand people between 1843 and 1865 (Jeffrey xi), and are among the more than eight hundred people whose journals have been published or put in archives (Schlissel Women's Diaries 10). The diaries in the Bancroft were either originals or typed transcripts sent by relatives of the writer at Berkeley Professor William Paden’s request, sometime in the 1940’s. The transcripts often had a letter written directly to Dr. Paden, offering more information about the writer. The first diary I saw was an original one by Mrs. Susan Marsh Cranston (1829-1857), which was titled simply “Daily Journal May 8-Aug. 27, 1851.” The diary was penciled on light blue crumpled lined paper with a string binding. The sheets of paper had been cut in half, and there was writing on both sides. Entries flowed day to day, one into the other with just the date to divide. Sometimes the writing was jumbled, perhaps written while the wagon was moving. Mrs. Cranston often recorded the number of graves she saw by writing in between the lines. These brittle sheets of paper held her personal experience, one which I was privileged to read. It was exciting to know that I held in my hands a document that a woman from a different time had held in hers, not knowing if she and her family would make it to Oregon intact. I also found a typed transcript of her diary, which is accompanied by letters she and her husband wrote from Oregon.
Many of the original diaries were far too fragile or worn to photocopy, so I chose eight typed transcripts and one original that I could copy from microfilm and bring back to Ohio with me. It appears that some of the typed manuscripts have been checked for grammatical correctness and spelling by relatives of the emigrants, and I was unable to find the originals. I will assume that the entire content was left intact. These nine diaries are the focus of my study, though I have come across excerpts from numerous others, including men's diaries, all of which I intend to refer to in order to create an "intertextuality" among the diaries. The original copies of the diaries very often had no context beyond what the writer provided. The journals offered to the Bancroft by relatives quite often included a letter that filled in information on the family before and after the journey. These genealogies embody the importance the journals have in the history of a particular family, who inherited not only the physical object, but the family stories revolving around it. Because folklorists generally transcribe oral language into written form anyway, it was important to me to have these artifacts to draw my interpretations from; I cannot speak with these women, so I can only know them by their relatives' genealogies and the ways they have constructed themselves and their experiences in their diaries.

The diaries range from 1850 to 1864, years that marked the height of the emigration. Before 1849, when gold was discovered in California, settlers trickled west. After the discovery, there were massive migrations. These were often honeymoon trips, which was the case for Susan Cranston in 1850. Others went with already established families. Still others, mostly men, traveled alone.
in a pack train. All went to find their fortunes. Mrs. Francis H. Sawyer's husband had gone out in 1849, then returned and accompanied his wife.

Reminiscences were also a popular way to record the experience, allowing for reflection upon it. One was written in 1877 by Lydia Milner Waters about the journey taken in 1855. It was for her oldest son, who was five at the time the family emigrated: “My dear Cochran...I wish you would keep this account of crossing the plains until the year 1900. It will then be amusing to read of things many years past and forgotten. In these dull times it has taken me back to some pleasant scenes. You will always remember riding the black horses. Your mother, Lydia Waters.” Her sons placed this chronicle with The Society of California Pioneers, and they printed it in 1929. The nostalgia evoked by the experience is a major difference between reminiscences and contemporaneous diaries. The memory becomes selective and most often moves toward the positive or the good times (“the black horses”). The other reminiscence is by Adrietta Applegate Hixon, published in 1947 by Signal-American Printers in Weiser, Idaho and is actually the story of her mother’s crossing. She had heard the story so many times that she wished to write it down before it was lost to future generations. She felt she was able to do this because “Mother had a remarkable memory, and it was her delight to tell these many incidents of her early life. Her manner of telling them was at times so expressive with pathos, or at other times she would speak with such lilt of joy, that often I despaired of being able to reproduce her story. Yet while writing I seemed to be living it myself, so vivid had been her narrative skill” (Introduction to the story).
The original diary manuscript was by Mary Fish. Her diary, "A Daily Journal Written During An Overland Journey to California," written in 1860, has a literary quality and a self-consciousness quite obvious in her epigraph on the inside cover page: "Don’t view me with a critic's eye/ But pass my imperfections by." This disclaimer shows that she assumed an audience for her writing. Her diary is about 8 inches by 13 inches, and its cover has a marble-like finish to it. The pages are weathered and only the first twenty-eight are from the original. After that, she begins revising. The back of the journal contains poetry and recipes.

"Journal Kept While Crossing the Plains" is the title Ada Millington gave to her diary written in 1862 when she was 13 years old. She too has a literary self-consciousness. She kept her diary in an old account book, and six years later she revised it. The original revision was written in a board-bound brown ledger, and follows the family's trip through a newly opened route across Nevada. The revised version is the account that I was able to get a copy of, printed in the Journal of the Historical Society of Southern California. Charles G. Clarke borrowed the diaries from Mrs. Flora Jones Conner, the author's daughter. In the introduction, Clarke offers background information on Ada Millington. At the time of the revision, she would have been nineteen and just graduated from high school. She had literary abilities and contributed writings to the local newspaper throughout her life (14). He comments on her revision compared with the original: "the author has made a few additions and some clarification, but has kept her original phrasing and language. She has retained
all her first impressions and descriptions much as she originally wrote them” (14).

In contrast to the literary self-consciousness of the previous writers, Mary Hall Jatta writes short, simple, and descriptive entries, a chronicle which follows the land along the Platte River and along the railroads in 1858. They describe the daily chores, such as baking and washing. One day’s entry says simply, “Ironed.” Her entries move through cool weather and hot, dusty weather. They move through plains and mountain and desert. And they mention encounters with Indians and Mormons. Her granddaughter made a typescript of the diary at Professor Paden’s request.

The typescript of Maria J. Elliot Norton’s 1859 diary is preceded by two genealogies. One genealogy was done by Frank Matthewson, whose mother, Carrie, was traveling companion and friend to Maria Elliot. Her diary was lost but was supposedly almost identical to Maria’s; thus it is an important family document to the Matthewsons as well as to the Nortons. The other genealogy, in the form of an introduction to the diary, was written by Maria’s son, Arthur Norton. He made a typescript of the diary in 1913. Maria’s father and brother went out west, and then her brother came back to accompany the family across the plains. Maria wrote her diary on blue-tinted paper at “odd moments”—on cracker boxes and wagon tongues—along the journey. Her son states that she never reread the diary nor corrected it, “Hence it has no literary finish.” He did change a few things to “vary expression,” or “clear up the meaning.” He did not know there was a diary until 1909, after his father’s death, at which time his mother gave it to him “to preserve among the relics of the family.” He made
several copies to avoid loss or damage. Her diary begins May 6, 1859. Her entries are long, and include lots of detail about the scenery, the people and the daily activity. She tells stories about hunting buffalo and stopping to listen to music. She describes and evaluates each town as they pass through. Despite her son's gentle criticisms of her writing, she seems to be an educated, cultured woman, for she makes unsympathetic comments about sod and log houses. Moreover, she is quite interested in "some nice-looking gents" (13) in the streets of a town, commenting that she hadn't seen any for a long time. Her diary ends abruptly on Saturday, the 24th of September. Arthur notes that his mother told him that she did not continue her diary after meeting her husband-to-be in Carson Valley, Nevada, for reasons not disclosed.

The last two transcripts are diaries written in 1864. The first is entitled "Diary of Mary Eliza Warner, Written at the age of Fifteen, Covering the Trip by Wagon Train of Her Family to California in 1864." It is followed by a list of the members of the family, a "cast of characters" for her following narrative. Mary Eliza was the oldest daughter of Alexander and Mary Elliot. She was fifteen at the time of crossing. She had two brothers and one sister, and two aunts and an uncle joined them in the crossing. Her diary begins Monday, March 28th, 1864 with a train ride to the starting point of their journey by covered wagon. The entries are short and descriptive of the landscape, the distance and the Indians seen along the way. Her diary ends on Wednesday, July 27th after having made it to California. A foreword to the diary written by an unknown person states that Alexander (her father) and Chester (his brother) had gone out
previously and had set up a cattle ranch in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Mary
Eliza's family stayed there until 1868, then moved to Oakland.

Mary Eliza's aunt, Mary Elizabeth Parkhurst Warner, also kept a journal
of the trip, explicitly written for loved ones who would not be with her on her
journey. Her diary entries are longer and more descriptive and evaluative of
what is around her. Despite her zealous beginning, she stops writing on
Monday, June 27th, “as the rest of our journey will be very monotonous I shall
keep no journal of everyday events. I get so tired when night comes that it is an
effort for me to take my pencil.” Accompanying the diary is a letter dated April
21, 1953, written by Mary Elizabeth's great grandson, Ken, to someone named
Roy, who seems to be connected with the diaries as well. Ken made a copy of
Mary Elizabeth's diary, stating that he "changed the word ‘done’ to ‘did’ where
advisable, and put in some rather casual punctuation." In her eighties, Mary
Elizabeth herself had made a copy of her original diary, from which Ken copied
this transcript. He notes that her diary mostly agrees with Mary Eliza's, with
discrepancies toward the end about the people who stayed in their train. Later
in the letter, Ken states that he hopes to get the original diary to copy, but that it
is very faded and lacks punctuation. He hoped that the original would clear up
the discrepancies they saw. Apparently his mother lent the original out, and I
could not find any records of him having found it.

The many daily entries in women’s diaries of the overland journey
encompass the overall point that these women are traveling, changing their
lives, and recording this life to create a link with contemporary and future
readers. They left behind the cultures that they knew in order to reestablish one
out in the West. The in-between time is the journey, and the diary writing is a way to exert some control over the unknown and to write themselves into existence during this time. The following chapters investigate the existences of these pioneer women on their journey west.
CHAPTER 2

CHRONICLES

The westward movement represented hope and adventure for everyone—women, men, children, the wealthy, the farmer, the educated and uneducated. They all knew they were taking part in an important historical event, and the number of journals that were kept indicates that everyone felt that the journey was something to document. Because the journey somewhat leveled class, age, and gender boundaries, journal writing was not just an activity for the learned or adults, and it appeared in numerous forms. The journals are constructed according to conventions of the diary genre, which involve positing an identity to a given audience through voice, the length of entries, and decisions about what to say and how to say it. These can change according to whether the journal was written en route or as a reminiscence, which is an important distinction in terms of the distance in time and identity between the writer and the lived experience. When looking at the diary, especially the chronicle-type, the rhetorical and historical situation needs to be identified in order to interpret the identity and the world view of individuals writing the diaries. The primary diary in this chapter is that of Susan Marsh Cranston, whose letters end up providing more information about her identity.
One noted trails scholar, Merrill J. Mattes, recently wrote an annotated bibliography of every trail diary known. This bibliography contains a section at the beginning explaining his criteria for the definition of diary, journal, letter, and recollection. He explains that the diary is composed on a daily basis, while the traveler was en route. Mattes calls it the original field book. The log is a subcategory of the diary, and is defined as having entries that are “mere one-line notations on routine matters.” The journal is a “detailed progressive account” which is written not necessarily on a daily basis; it is often based on a combination of an actual diary as well as recollections. He writes, “Many journals are obviously composed with an audience, such as descendants, in mind; others, showing rhetorical polish, suggest intent to publish, whether or not this intent was fulfilled” (Mattes 9). A recollection is a narrative written after the journey. He also rates the historical and literary value of each work, using a scale of from one to five stars; 1—of limited value, 2—fair, 3—good, 4—excellent, 5—outstanding. He does not give any definition of what historical or literary value means, but he does make a value judgment of the recollection: “As a class it is, of course, inferior to a diary or journal in accuracy and historical value, but all recollections included have some degree of value, and some are surprisingly accurate and readable” (9). To Mattes, then, what is valued is a journal that is historically accurate and interesting, from his own point of view, but he also assumes the authority to speak for an educated elite.

A folklorist, however, studies situated texts, where realities are constructed and we are part of the construction. While it is true that many of the journals of the trail are not as polished as others, the differences in style reflect
individual women's and men's experiences. Each has its own historical accuracy. However, because the basic structure and the journey described are similar, it is easy to place the kind of values on them that Mattes does—a log is not going to be as interesting or historically accurate to its audience as a journal is.

The first notable aspect that distinguishes the less self-conscious writings from the conscious is the minimal information that orients a reader. Because the journal is a kind of narrative, the reader expects orientation information. William Labov, studying oral narratives, lists orientation as the second element in the structure of a narrative. He states that "at the outset, it is necessary to identify in some way the time, place, persons, and their activity or the situation" (Labov 364). Most chronicles do list the date and the "jumping off place" but do not list the people involved or the situation they are in at departure time until further into the journal. The writers are writing to themselves in the immediate context, thus they do not orient the reader to the situation. The journals become a sort of historical artifact—a piece of family history recording the fact of the journey, rather than directly communicating much about themselves to their families. Perhaps that is what is left up to letter writing in these writers' eyes (an issue explored later in this chapter).

Chronicle-type journals tend to be repetitive recordings of daily happenings, most likely as a result of what the individual writer sees as a "proper" travel journal, and maybe because of the lack of privacy and time on the trails. Perhaps they don't see themselves as important figures in the journey and in history. Some may also want to distance themselves as the subject in
the journey because they don’t want to be making it. Many diarists, as shall also be discussed in subsequent chapters, see the journey as allegorical—they are representative of a group that is journeying to “the Promised Land.” Whatever the reason, the less self-conscious diaries lack a kind of subjective voice, rarely referring to themselves, but rather using “we” or an implied “we”.

The daily journal of Susan Marsh Cranston is a good example of a diary in which the writer uses short entries, few sentence subjects and a lack of awareness of a reading audience. Susan’s diary starts out simply:

May 8th. Crossed the Missouri river drove 2 miles and encamped, our company consisted of 14 wagons with from 4 to 6 yokes of oxen to each and about 30 head of loose cows and young cattle and 14 horses.

Upon first reading, one might get the impression that Susan Marsh Cranston writes dryly, and thus dismiss her as unimaginative. Yet the information she includes would be the most important for survival and the most comforting to her, a woman who was leaving family and country that she knew for the unknown. However, for readers she leaves a lot of orientation questions unanswered. Who were her traveling companions? Where was the starting point? How did she feel leaving a country and a civilization she knew for a land that sounded inviting but had many dangers as well? Without these details, we don’t have a sense of who she is or what her narrative will be like. She does not invite us to care about her wagon party, so we may not be sure if we want to read on.
Many of the elements readers are used to in narratives and in speaking with people face to face are missing already in this diary. What is important to her as a journal writer in nineteenth-century frontier America is not as important to me as a literary narrative reader in late twentieth century suburban America. According to Mark E. Workman, my response to the text is informed by “the interpretive and evaluative conventions” that I share with fellow twentieth century readers (4). Namely, this response includes judgments on the unique character of the work, unraveling of the plot, expert manipulation of the language, and psychological complexity. On first reading, I may impose aesthetic value based on the narrative as a genre, while she is following the aesthetics that she thinks travel journal writing calls for. As a modern reader with a head full of romanticized western images, I expect entertaining tales of adventure in prose full of metaphor and reflection on the West and the American character. My evaluation of her performance is based on thematic conventions set up in later years and mythologized. But as a genre, one function of trail journals, based on published emigrant guides, was to be a survival guide for future travelers, not as a subjective adventure story; with this in mind, Susan adopts an objective voice.

Objectivity, coupled with a thesis of survival, are the parameters within which Susan writes, and objectivity is a strong presence in the chronicles, while subjectivity becomes more prominent in the journals and reminiscences. She is not conscious of an evaluating audience and does not take on authorial intent to entertain or reflect. With the differing aesthetic frames between the diarist and the twentieth century audience member, like myself, aesthetic expectations
of the text may not be met. Her lack of awareness of audience in general is why, in her opening entry, the background information she is most interested in is determined, not by a narrative structure or a reading audience, but by her understanding of the genre and her wagon party’s immediate needs. She is more interested in reporting information important to her and the whole group for survival—the yokes of oxen would be strong enough to move them to Oregon safely, and the cattle and horses would be imperative to their survival once there—than she is in performing her narrative for a reading audience. This emphasis on reporting or “witnessing” is strongest in the chronicle-type diary, setting it apart from the performative functions of the journal and reminiscence.

Ultimately, reading becomes a search for engagement with the text, making meaning of entries that do not seem to differentiate between significant narrative events and daily routine. Dure Jo Gillikin, in “A Lost Diary Found: The Art of the Everyday” places the onus of responsibility for “weighting” these events on the reader, making them “participatory authors,” who help “to create the story by adding in the details based on experience and on readings in literature, history, psychology, and sociology” (131). She shares my fascination with these narratively “boring” diaries and with the identity created through them. The reader can use this interpretive frame to maintain interest and suspend judgment, and if patient, will find that Susan fills in more background information by the 2nd and 3rd day, while maintaining the pattern of referencing survival concerns:

May 9. Drove 12 or 15 miles had a hard rain in the forenoon stopped an hour at noon encamped at night in the prairie with
tolerable grass and water but no wood, cooked with weeds.

Saturday May 10th. Drove to Weepingwater stopped an hour at noon and arrived early at camp, not very good grass but wood and water. There numbered the wagons to take turns driving ahead.

There were 30 men, 13 women, and a number of children. Passed 11 graves.

Juxtaposing the number of live people with the number of dead people (though they were not part of her wagon train) is a coded way for Susan to express both optimism and danger on the journey. The number of live people is four times more than the dead, which could be read as a ratio metaphorically favoring survival on the journey, but the number of dead keeps her aware that there are also dangers.

By the end of this passage, Susan has described the organization and number of people in the wagon train, and by the fourth day she describes what she sees around her:

Sunday 11th. Drove 12 miles, crossed Salt creek and encamped near the bottom where there was good grass wood and water, 3 or 4 wagons camped on the other side of the creek with horse and mule teams. Salt creek derived its name from the saltiness of its water which is not for use although our stock drank it without any perceptible injury. The country thus far that is between the Missouri and Weeping water, Weeping water and Salt creek presents an extensive prairie which is very rolling. The eye scans the open distance in vain to find an object upon which it may rest, at times
the eye is employed in scanning the course of a stream which may be seen from 10 to 15 miles according to the height of the hill from which you look, except the scattering trees upon the banks of the streams. There is scarcely a stick large enough for a riding whip, nothing but the rolling prairie, one hill has not ended before another is begun. At this time the grass is not high or long enough for anything but sheep or geese but we have been lucky enough so far to find good grazing on the hills and in the creek bottoms sufficient for our teams but if we had better we should like it. The grass will soon be good on the high prairie and we have had plenty of rain lately.

Susan emphasizes the rolling prairies and the great distances she sees. From letters written later from Oregon, we know that she is from Woodstock, Ohio. By 1851, Ohio had many towns and small farms—a landscape transformed by human settlement. These vast open spaces of the prairie were new to her, for the most part untouched by white settlement, and her response is almost poetic; she employs the eye of anyone making the journey, thus employing a number of viewpoints with one device. The “eye-searching” is not only an objective metaphor for the entire journey—the collective search for a place to settle, but the metonym—using the “eye” to stand for the “I”—indicates her subjective viewpoint. As stated in the Introduction, this metonym sounds Emersonian; it is at least informed by the pictorial mode associated with Emerson and other nineteenth-century writers. This figurative language clues the reader into her emotional landscape. She is an active participant in the journey, awed by the
landscape, but not too threatened. In fact, she boldly responds to it according to what it can do for humans ("Scarcely a stick large enough for a riding whip"). Annette Kolodny writes extensively about women's views of the frontier landscape from 1630 to 1860. She notes that one woman, traveling in 1784 through Ohio, made numerous comments about the beauty of the terrain but that there was also "some hint of the potential for human settlement" (Kolodny 39). Susan's comment suggests that this particular landscape, for her, does not have potential; however, the very act of writing asserts an individual identity which she inscribes on the landscape. She is literally and figuratively writing herself into existence against the backdrop of nature's disregard for humans.

As Susan progresses to the fifth day of the journey, her entries become a kind of refrain of the journey:

Monday 12th. Started at 7 o'clock stopped at-----. There was not much grass but water for the cattle and wood. Passed 16 graves.

Had good grass, wood and water. We have not been in sight of timber today only at our camps at morning and night.

This passage echoes everything that she is concerned with on the journey for survival. This is also repetition of the familiar in this unfamiliar land. There is comfort in the availability of water and wood and grass, and writing about it is equally as comforting. But there is also discomfort in every grave sighted--another use of the metonym which stands for the possibility of death on the journey. Her party was traveling during a cholera epidemic, but accidents, lack of resources, Indian attacks, even childbirth, could mean death. In performance terms, these repetitious entries communicate the day to day journey, but their

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simplistic drone drowns out the grave metacommunication (Bauman Verbal Art 16-19)—if these resources are not present the pioneers will perish. Again, the number of graves noted keeps this fact painfully present in their thoughts, and closing almost every entry with the number of graves passed is a formulaic way to thank God that they made it through another day alive. These short refrains are verbal maintenance of their good status thus far.

In comparison with the shorter “maintenance” entries, Susan notes changes in status quo of landscape and supplies in a much longer entry:

Tuesday 13th. No one knew the camping ground further until Fort Carney [Kearney, Nebraska Territory]. Our camp master Mr. Alexander has been to California, but he started from St. Joseph. We took some wood and water and drove until noon when we stopped an hour for the cattle to rest and graze and encamped at night in the prairie. We had tolerable grass but neither wood or water except what we had brought. The prairie has been more broken today. There has been shrubs and small trees in sight in the ravines most of the time. 3 Indians the first that we had seen met us just at night and followed us to camp. They appeared very friendly and were begging. They had paper and on it was written with a pencil “these are friendly Indians you had better treat them well” They seemed unwilling to leave but we sent them away at dusk. 8 graves.

In this passage, Susan has written about everything that can be encountered and is perilous on the journey. The length of the entry indicates her concern for
unknown destinations, no wood or water, a camp master who had never traveled the particular route before, and Indians. She moves onto another kind of hardship on the trails, the weather:

Wednesday 14th. Had a very hard shower with wind and hail which scattered the cattle so that we did not start very early, drove about 10 miles and encamped with neither wood or water except what we brought with us. Passed two graves, the appearance of the country about the same as yesterday.

So far in her journal, she mentions nothing of the promise of the new land or even exactly where they plan to go: she literally is taking one day at a time. In each day’s entry, she uses a kind of shorthand to describe aspects of life on the trail that do not change much from day to day, creating a formulaic response to the countryside and the journey. Her diary continues on in this fashion until the last entry of August 27, 1851. “Travelled about 8 miles up the creek and encamped. The two last camps have been tolerable.” This entry does not seem very satisfying. It is like the opening in that it leaves a number of questions unanswered for a reader—Did they make it? Where did they end up? How does she feel after that long journey? Here again, readers must concede that she is not concerned with a reading audience.

Susan’s shorthand style may have its source in a number of things. The original diary was small and looked handmade. Susan’s entries were cramped and there was barely space between each day, so she did not have much room to write. She also may not have had much time, with all the demands upon her on the trail. Perhaps it was due to what she perceived the diary to function as—
map for others to follow--based on published diaries by Lansford Hastings, Joel Palmer, Andrew Child, and others.

Susan Cranston's was not the only diary full of shorthand entries and third person pronouns. As Mattes found, there were many diaries that took on a similar pattern to Susan's. Mary Hall Jatta's diary of 1858 entitled "Journal of a Trip Across the Plains" starts much the same way as Susan Marsh Cranston's:


The land rolling and beautiful.

This writer as well does not orient the reader to the people in the party or what supplies they have or where they are from. Her reference to the beauty of the land is the only indication that so far, she has a positive outlook on the new land. Following this opening passage, she briefly sums up each day's progress:

Saturday May 29th. Traveled all day, distance 25 miles. Reached Platsmouth about Four O'clock traveled along the Mo River to Platsmouth. Camped on the Platte River ford cooked our supper and slept in our tent. Sunday May 30th. Crossed the Platte river in a small Ferry boat traveled all day over high rolling prairies distance about 25 miles. Camped on Buffalo Creek.

Monday 31st. Traveled all day over high rolling prairie rode horse back part of the day. Camped at night within a mile of the Union Pacific Rail Road (the first for a long time) on the Elkhorn River.
She is faithful to record the events of every day. She refers to the distances and the place names, all the while using the pronoun “we” as does Susan Cranston. She seems happy to be in sight of the railroad, a sign of civilization.

Within the next few entries, she has mentioned everything that her party will face along the way, except death, indicated by no mention of graves.

Tuesday June 1st. After getting our breakfast and packing up started on at Eight O'clock reached Freemont most night it is a very pretty town middling large situated on the Platte river distance is 18 miles along the RR.

Wednesday June 2nd. Left Freemont at Ten O'clock traveled 20 miles Over level country which is quite thickly settled saw quite a good many Pawnee Indians missed the road passed through North Bend. Camped at night on a small stream.

Thursday June 3rd. After we had our breakfast an Indian came where we were and after slyly peeking in our wagons asked for some sugar and hunk of meat for Indian Papoose. It rained quite hard in the night the horses ran off camped on the Platte River where there had been a house and barn burnt the country is quite level.

Her diary continues to unravel with daily, short entries until the last one of Sunday, August 5th.

One notable pattern in both diaries is the continual description of the land around them, aside from its usefulness to humans. Susan, at times, goes into
detail about the land and the vegetation and describes the landscape as beautiful, even romantic:

Saturday, May 31st . . . Ash Hollow is two miles long and from 15 to 30 miles wide winding around the bluffs which tower up on either side sometimes to the height of 60 feet. The road through the hollow was lined with shrubs and flowers, wild roses, cow cherries and scrub ash and up on the bluffs small cedars . . .

Thursday June 5th . . . Our encampment was in a romantic place in a hollow where there was a little stream and high bluffs nearly surrounding us covered with small cedars and pines . . .

Sunday, June 15. Drove about 15 miles, stopped 2 hours at noon on the bank of the river in a beautiful place where it was lined with cottonwood and bushes, encamped at night on the river, had very poor grass.

Mary Hall Jatta also describes the landscape as beautiful and romantic:

Saturday June 26th. Passed Sidney about 8 o’clock it is a beautifully situated town between the mountains. The scenery has been romantic today with mountains and valleys. Camped at half past four at Potters Station distance 21 miles.

This repeated interest in describing the landscape is one indication that the women were not necessarily unhappy to be traveling or that it was a journey that was too hard to be enjoyed. Though the journey took them out of a land where they had homes and families, it was not out of the ordinary to truly look forward to the journey:
Left the Missouri river for our long journey across the wild uncultivated plains and unhabited [sic] except by the red man. As we left the river bottom and ascended the bluffs the view from them was handsome! . . with good courage and not one sigh of regret I mounted my pony . . ." (Lydia Allen Rudd, 1852).

The repeated mention of Native Americans as associated with the land sets up a convenient way (for the whites) to justify the whites’ colonialism: civilized, Christian people and culture had the duty and the right to tame the land and the Native Americans.

M. H. Dunlop found a similar pattern of interest in the landscape and daily life in nineteenth-century travel journals about the interior US (the Midwest states from Ohio to Minnesota). She states that:

Travel literature constitutes a literature of public life and the visible landscape. Even though traveling women had greater access to private domestic spaces than did traveling men, in fact most travel books focused on public life in the interior. Nonetheless, travelers had unparalleled access to daily life because, with nearly everyone on the move, much of the private and personal was carried on in public in the nineteenth-century interior. . . (5) Furthermore, through repeated description, travel literature created a public agenda of notable sites and items on the visible landscape . . . Most travel books had much less to say about presidents, states, political events, and local conflicts than they did about the dailiness of life, the sweep and details of landscape, the
tensions of mobility, and irritations of manners. The events they ignored or missed occur and fade, and the noted personages they failed to meet pass into myth or oblivion, but the dailiness they observed persists, shifting, looping, backtracking, leaping forward, reappearing (6).

She goes on to compare these travel journals with modern travel literature and finds the same patterns in the advertisements that nineteenth-century travelers were concerned with—landscape and comfort in an unfamiliar land.

**Letters presenting a different self—Susan Marsh Cranston**

Along with Susan Marsh Cranston’s diary are letters she and her husband, Warren, wrote from Oregon territory. The set of letters were written from 1852-1859 and were addressed most often to her sister and brother-in-law Rueben and Huldah (Marsh) Fairchild. They help to highlight the differences in the writer’s sense of audience; in her diary, she does not present much of her “self”, while in her letters, she has a playful voice and a literary self consciousness.

This difference in persona indicates that the characteristics of the chronicle-type diary may not be entirely located in the indefinite subject position, but also in the indefinite audience the women are writing for. The women writing these types of journals may be far more familiar with letter-writing, an activity that has an intimate audience with whom the writer is a competent communicator. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp has explored the differing personae put forth in the different genres of letter writing and diary
keeping by one nineteenth-century Baltimore woman, Madge Preston. Her
diary is used as a private document in which to record her innermost emotions
about her husband's affair and abuse, while the letters she writes to her
dughter put forth a happy exterior. Beauchamp calls the diary a place to
record pain and anguish while the letter is a social contract. She uses the diary
to "penetrate the letter's language of silences" that ultimately create an ideal
fiction of a woman's life (40). In Susan's case, it is the letters accompanying the
diary which serve to fill in some of the silences about her identity.

The striking difference between the self she presented in the diary and
the person that presents her everyday, settled persona is exemplified in a letter
written by a friend, visiting the Cranstons in Oregon, named J. W. Davenport
(Susan calls him Jo). He writes the letter to Susan's sister, Huldah, who lives in
Illinois:

Miss Huldah:

As I am here at Warren's and a good opportunity offers, I
thought I would write you a few lines. . .In the first-place, Warren
sits figuring on my right while Suze is writing on my left and she
keeps snuffing the candle so I can't half see. I should suppose
from your letters that you thought we had nothing here in Oregon,
either to eat, drink, or anything of this sort. But if you were here a
few days, your thoughts would be badly disappointed. What do
you think Sue had for dinner today? Why, I will tell you (viz.) one
roasted pig, one baked fowl, biscuit and butter, syrup, pies and
cakes, preserves consisting of strawberry and huckleberry, peach,
etc. besides plenty of salmon fish, and many other things too numerous to mention. There Sue snuffed the candle again. There it is again. Maybe you think we have no parties here in Oregon. I expect we have two to where you do one. We have had one in Salem this last winter and had 40 ladies present and about as many gentlemen. Isaac [Susan's brother] was there and had cotilions [sic] for them. Sue and Warren was at a party not long since out in the country and enjoyed themselves finely. They danced all night. There Sue jogged me. I believe Sue and Warren enjoys themselves extremely well. Sue is teaching school in this neighborhood. I know not the number of schollars [sic] in attendance. Isaac is out with the surveyors. Well I believe there is no news worth nameing [sic] only it has stopped raining. Sue hasn't snuffed the candle for 2 minutes and Warren's old clock that hasn't struck with the pendulum for more than 3 months has started to running this evening on its own accord and he can't stop it. Well Miss Huldah I don't know that I shall have the honor of addressing you again untill [sic] you are Mrs. but whether or not, receive the well wishes of your friend.

J. W. Davenport

J. W. Davenport seems to be a good natured man who has a good relationship with Warren, Susan, and her family. He gives her the nickname "Suze" which apparently is a term of endearment and familiarity. Up until I read this letter, I had not gotten much of a sense of what Susan was like. But the image of her
teasing Jo by continuing to snuff out the candle and “joggling” him while he was trying to write is a powerful one in terms of revealing her identity.

In the letter Susan writes, she playfully contradicts Jo’s “wonders”—folk belief about the great bounty of the Oregon territory. “Jo has been writing some wonders instead of telling what we had for dinner. He told what might be had here, but when I tell you what we had it will sound some different. Potatoes, dried-beef, light-bread, butter, peaches and syrup.” Stories of plenty were prevalent, and helped to draw people west. Susan, however, wishes to tell it like it is. Daniel Hoffman uses the term “wonders” in noting the supernatural significance of the theme of bounty in frontier folklore, dating back to John Smith’s landing. The theme constitutes a prevailing American attitude toward nature as “Earthly Paradise. The Land of Cockaigne, the prelapsarian Eden in the New World” (19). Hoffman states that these “yarns” were economically motivated, designed to encourage emigration. He also notes, however, that many gullible newcomers found themselves disenchanted with the land that was supposed to provide for man without hours of labor (Hoffman 19). Faced with this situation, the yarn or “tall tale” becomes a verbal practical joke enacted by an old timer toward a newcomer to the territory to “evince his superiority over the newcomers” (Hoffman 20). Ultimately, this became an initiation rite that established relationships between men engaged in a common struggle. It also served to separate those who could not adapt themselves to the needs of the group (Boatright 61-2). Hoffman’s examples speak primarily of male frontier performance; he speaks nothing of a female folkloric response to the frontier. Perhaps Susan’s is a good example. She nips J. W. Davenport’s verbal
practical joke in the bud by revealing his exaggerations, thus establishing her moral superiority over him by telling her sister the truth. But she also establishes superiority over him in terms of her performance. He tries to adapt a standard tall tale-telling situation (face to face between male old timers in frontier territory and “city-slicker” newcomers) to a letter writing situation between himself, a male newcomer to the territory, and Susan’s own sister in Illinois. The conditions are not right and his yarn fails. But he does succeed in initiating himself to the territory by telling the tale (he remains in Oregon), thus allying himself with others in the struggle to survive in Oregon Territory.

Susan’s truth-telling, then, positions her as the old timer. She contradicts the prevailing folk belief of “wonders” of the land, and sabotages the playing of a verbal practical joke. She allies herself with her sister as well by revealing Davenport’s tale telling, and by doing so, suggests her female folkloric response to the frontier--ally yourself with the new land but stay in close touch with the old. With this response she exerts power not only in the feminine realm but in the masculine as well. This kind of dual power speaks again of the fact that the emigration westward did some leveling of gender roles in society.

Though Susan has adapted to the frontier, she also has a strong desire to return home for a visit, as she states to her mother:

Tell grand-mother and grand-father that we have not forgotten them, but think of them often and are still in hopes to see them again . . . I do not expect we shall come in less than four or five years but I will live in hopes of seeing you all again, but it is
getting dark and I will write no more this time. Give my love and well wishes to all of our friends and keep some yourselves.

Susan [Wednesday evening, July 5, 1852]

The closing formula she uses in this letter is present throughout her letters home and is sometimes modified to “My love to all and goodbye for the present. Write often.” It is indicative of her connection to the people at home and her wish to know the news of her loved ones at a time when the mail system, which was very slow, was the only means of keeping in touch.

Along with the desire to keep in touch with home news is Warren and Susan’s desire to create their world in writing for the people at home to envision their lives. With each letter sent, Warren writes the first section and Susan finishes it up, usually before it is to go in the mail. Both are quite self-conscious that their news will be of little interest to their relatives: “I again sit down to pen a few thoughts to you or rather lines. I do not expect to interest you much.” (Warren); “I hardly know what to write but perhaps I can think of something that will interest you.” (Susan). These disclaimers let their audience know that they about to hear everyday news rather than “any big yarns which I have not room or time to tell you.” (Warren, Sunday evening March 2nd, 1852). However, disclaimers work as a surface denial of competence in verbal art, so in actuality, even just their everyday life is of interest to family members. He continues this letter with telling how much eggs are going for and how well the mines are doing:

Our market is sustained by the mines. Traders are continually coming in for bacon, flour, eggs, chickens, butter, etc. There is one
in this neighborhood now who is giving for butter 50 cents per pound, 37 cents for eggs . . . (Warren, July 5, 1852)

Warren's portion of the letter is concerned with the public sphere, the instrumental realm in which the male is responsible for the manipulation of objects in the physical world (Zelditch 314). He writes often about how his crops are doing:

. . . My wheat is not very stout, will not yield more than 16 or twenty bushels per acre. This part of the country is not so good for a large crop as some other portions. I have seen wheat here that is in the Willamette Valley that would turn 50 bushels, which is not uncommon in many parts. If I have not forgotten, we generally have about double the amount of grain to the same quantity of straw. From a dozen sheaves of good kind we get a bushel of wheat. There has never been anything but smut to spoil wheat. The rust or weevil has never been known, neither has there been any smut until last year and this. This year more than last. I will send you a wheat head or the kernels from one head. Weather, we have had some extremely warm weather for this country. It was said that the mercury stood at 98 degrees. I will let Suse write the ballance [sic] and close by wishing you health and prosperity.

Yours truly. Warren Cranston [Sunday, July 24th, 1853]

Susan finishes the letter with matters concerning the private sphere, the expressive realm which orients her to the home and to relationships with people (Chodorow 44).

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. . . We are making cheese. We milk 7 cows, the calves take part, and make a cheese every other day that weighs 12 pounds and sell them from 33 to 37 1/2 cents a pound. Warren is teaching school this summer in Lebanon. He has 6 dollars a schollar [sic] and 25 schollars. He is having a vacation of 3 weeks now for harvest.

You wanted to know about our baby. She is a little lady that anybody might be proud of. Her name is Amelia and she is better looking than her aunt Huld or her mother either. She is 7 months old today and weighs but 17 pounds, but she is a delicate plump little thing and has never been sick a day, with cheeks as red as roses, and brightest blue eyes you ever saw, and the biggest rowdy. She looks so much like you we ought to call her Huld. You would think she was sweet if you could see her some washing day, creeping over the flore [sic] into every slop she can find, but she loves a spree of washing in cold water. But I think I have written about nonsense enough and she has clum [sic] up by my knee asking me to take her. Everybody thinks their own dog the best so good bye for the present. Give my love to all enquiring friends and keep some yourselves.

Susan A. Cranston

This passage not only demonstrates Susan’s concern for activities in the private sphere, but again shows her sense of humor and sense of self.
While it is said that women are more concerned with matters of family and family history while men are more concerned with matters of society, Warren seems to be as interested in keeping connection with Susan's relatives as she is. Many of his letters begin with an extended discussion of how glad they were to hear from Huldah and Reuben, and how they should write more:

Dear Rube and Huld: Sunday, July 24th, 1853

We received yours of the 8th of May two weeks ago. We were well then and now the same. We were glad that you wrote. You spoke of your having written several letters to us. We have received but two from you. I hope you will not discontinue writing should you not get ours regularly. We shall write to you as we have done and perhaps oftener . . .

The letters leave off in 1856 with Susan's hope that the Pacific railroad would come through and she could go back East. The letters pick up again in 1858, and we learn that Susan has died of "the phthisic" or tuberculosis. Warren's grief over her death and his wish to remain connected to Susan's family is most desperate in the last few letters:

Esteemed Friends: Father's, April 25th 1858

Mr. I. J. Marsh and wife. Rheuben Fairchild and wife, and Orpha, Philo, George and Samuel Marsh, or all of you, for wish not to slight any of you.

I know not what I shall write until I get through. The friends in Oregon are all well. My children are still at Father's [Warren's parents live nearby and take care of the children so he can work].

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They have not been sick since their mother died . . . It has been six months or more since I received a note from any of you. I am still looking for a letter and shall continue to look for some time to come.

Lucinda Davenport is married to O. Jacobs and gone to R. River. I have been looking for my likeness or rather Susan's and mine . . . I want very much to see the picture and I hope you will send it to me. I would like to visit this coming fall. I am making some calculations to do so, yet there is nothing certain about it. If I meet with an opportunity of selling my interest in Oregon without sacrificing and you would do the same I will do so and bring the children.

[Here he goes on to offer help to anyone in the family who might want to come out—even sell part of his claim to them. He also tells more general news about crops and their prices.]

It is useless for me to harrow your feelings by speaking to you of my lonely condition or describing my feelings which are lonely indeed. I never expect to enjoy myself as I did when Susan was with me. There is a vacancy in my being or at least seems so. I cannot reconcile the idea of separation with Susan only in this wise, that although I am the loser, she is the gainer. She is free the toil, pain and anguish attendant to this life and gone I trust to heaven where pain and trouble are not known, when joys are said
to ever abound. I hope you will all write to me, Philo, George and Sammy and all . . .

The shift at the end of the letter to such personal remarks regarding Susan's death is extraordinary at a time when generally, it was not acceptable for men to show such emotion. He blames himself for her death in a later letter:

It has been over two years since Susan died and a long time it has been I assure you. I often times regret having come to Oregon, thinking perhaps had I not gone so Susan might perhaps still be living. She always told me that she did not regret coming, but perhaps it is all for the best. It would be better for man if he could be reconciled to the mysterious workings of providence. I cannot do otherwise than submit. My aim shall be to try and raise those little ones in such a manner that they will be as much respected as their mother was, but to do that I must be with them more than I have been since Susan died.

He becomes despondent when Susan's family does not answer his letter and share in his grief:

Rheuben Fairchild, Esq.

Esteemed Friend: July 25th, 1859

Pardon me for intruding on you if this be an intrusion. I have written some two or three times and not having received anything in return I sometimes think that you do not wish to correspond. Permit me to say this will be the last until I hear from you.
The last letter, dated October 4th, 1859, reveals that he finally received a letter from Susan’s sister:

Dear Sister:

I was happy not long since in receiving your kind letter. I had begun to despond thinking that I was forgotten or that I would like to be forgotten by you. But now that I have received yours of July 17th I am assured that you are yet my friend. I would have written sooner but when I received yours I had but just written to you.

We are all well. Elizzie [Warren’s sister] has a little girl a month or more old. She did not get up very quick and at this time is not very well, yet she is able to ride around some. She expects to go to Portland in three or four weeks.

I have but little news that will interest you. You speak of hard times. We have harder times here than I have seen since I have been here. There is but little sale for anything. We have no surplus of grain. But we have plenty of apples which are worth from two to three dollars per bushel, quite a difference from a year or two ago. Then they brought from five to ten. You spoke of land being perhaps high. Not so, land is low and should you want to come here you can purchase cheap by watching an opportunity. I will not attempt to advise, not knowing your circumstances. I would like very much to have you come here to live. I would almost part with half my land if by that means I could live with you.
and my children. The way I am now situated I am of necessity away from the children most of the time. I want to be with them, but I cannot and carry on my farm . . .

Now the color of my little girl's eyes. Amelia's, light blue. Ella's and Orpha's are black. Orpha is said to be handsome, indeed I think they all are. Orpha's hair is the blackest. But she has pulled it out so that it is quite short. She has a habit of sucking her fingers on one hand while with the other she is twisting and pulling her hair which keeps it short.

Excuse this long prosy letter which contains so little of value.

Yours respectfully,

Warren Cranston

An interesting thing has happened here. Along with matters of the public sphere, Warren has taken over Susan's job of describing the private sphere. It is a way of keeping Susan alive as well as meeting the needs of the audience.

These letters not only shed light on Susan's personality, the "self" that she does not present in the diaries, but also on the relationship she had with Warren. The popular nineteenth-century image of relationships is that women and men share very separate spheres and they should rarely cross boundaries. These letters and especially the ones written after Susan is dead express an equality between Susan and Warren, which may have been strengthened by the long journey west.
When Susan started her diary, she had no idea what the outcome would be. Her diary was an immediate means of expressing life on the trails. The letters reveal the outcome as well as fill in gaps about her personality and family, so pieced together they create a partial narrative of their lives in Oregon.

Both Susan Marsh Cranston and Mary Hall Jatta wrote chronicles of the journey. Their entries are short daily recordings verbalizing the topographical map of the journey. Dure Jo Gillikin writes that chronicles represent “a vast world made manageable as it is daily converted into fragments that contain the whole” (126). Initially, a character-type for these women presented itself—“Everywoman” (a term I borrow and modify from medieval drama)—which suggests my interpretation of these chronicles as allegorical as well as the possibility that the women saw their journeys also as such. Their depiction of the journey is simple, and, because they do not write much about themselves as individuals, could represent any pioneer woman’s journey. However, their prose reveals individual response to various aspects of the journey. So what is their subject position? The act of writing a travel journal suggests that they are aware that they are engaged in something of historical importance worth chronicling. Yet what they see as important is the everyday—recording the maintenance of status quo. Perhaps because the journey was predominantly a male generated one, these women may have seen themselves as unworthy subjects, considering that the published journals were by men, so they mimic the structure and language of some of the published diaries to lend authority to their writing. If the purpose of their diaries was to mimic the published ones, then their audience would also have been generalized (and obscured). The
diaries then, ultimately, may have been written with the intent to present a
generalized, objective self. Combined with this is the idea that since they were
traveling in a land they had never seen before, engaging in experiences
hitherto unknown to them, they did not have the metaphors to comprehend it.
The other explanation of the objective voice is that the diarists also were using
the diary entries as mnemonic devices, which would indicate the diaries as
highly subjective--the diarist herself being the only audience. The reader could
interpret that the identity they present is calm and accepting of circumstances
because the writer does not place a value judgment on her circumstances.
Going back to frames of reference, this statement would go along with a
twentieth century romanticized image of the stalwart, strong pioneer woman.
But at the time of writing, just the statement of the fact in the diarist's entries may
have revealed the inherent judgment or emotion placed upon the experience by
both the writer and any would-be nineteenth-century readers who would share
in the understanding of the dangers present on the trails. Most likely, readers at
that time would have been family or friends, and they would have had access to
any metacommunication the author intended. The alternative explanation, still
having to do with anticipating family readers, could be that they felt the need to
present stalwart attitudes toward this journey so that friends and family would
not worry about them, so they refrained from commentary. Close relations could
still, however, decode the diarist's text because they would have access to how
she felt about the journey. Regardless, through the chronicle, the presentation
of the diarist to a reading audience is not as revealing as in the literary self-
conscious journals or the reminiscences.
While the chronicle diary writers lack a self-consciousness, the literary journal writers write from a position of consciousness about themselves as authors. These writers have an awareness of a reading audience other than themselves, indicated in the voice and narrative quality of their journals. The sense of audience is stated overtly in a number of journals, even in men’s journals. For example, one woman pens on her cover “Don’t view me with a critic’s eye/But pass my imperfections by” (Mary Fish, “Daily Journal Written During An Overland Journey to California”). James Abbey, while just outside of Fort Laramie, deflects blame for his writing ability: “you must excuse all errors, as I write seated upon a bucket, with a board on my knees, a candle in a lantern with the wind blowing, and extremely cold” (Mattes collection, 1850). Many journals were written with the intention to rewrite, as one man indicates on the front of his journal: “Journal of a Trip Across the Plains in the Year 1849 by David Carnes. Intended for Revision and Correction.” And many were rewritten. Ada Millington, traveling in 1862 at the age of 13, rewrote her journal in 1868. Mary Fish’s original diary covers 28 pages, and the rest is a revision. There is no indication of when she revised. These examples are not only
indications that the writers are aware of a reading audience, but also that they are aware of themselves as performers. In one form or another, these examples are all disclaimers of performance—"a surface denial of any real competence" (Bauman Verbal Art 22) at being able to record the journey adequately. But the disclaimer of competence is only a surface denial, indicating that perhaps the author feels she actually does have competence to record her responses to the journey.

All the journal writers seem to be influenced not only by a reading audience but a sense of what "good writing" should look like. They carefully word many of their entries in an eloquence missing for the most part from the chronicles. The writers often use the first person pronoun, something also entirely missing in the chronicle diaries. The journal writers reflect on and evaluate their experiences freely. The writers are well-off and seem to be well-educated, which helps to explain the more literary style of writing present in these diaries. These are differences which are apparent even from the opening entries of the journals:

This day I commence the journey overland for California, leaving home, Dekalb, DeKalb Co., Illinois--bidding goodbye to the dear ones: Father, Mother, two sisters, one brother, and the many friends who had called during the day. A journey to contain many untried events in my life, opening into a future full of imagination and with the bidding of farewell, a promise to keep a daily journal that friends may know of the pleasures and also unpleasant times that we are sure to meet with—but youth sees no
danger at the age of twenty-three--all looks rosy and bright . . . And now dear ones, I will faithfully try to write and return you these pages to be kept until we may meet again . . . Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, April 7th, 1864.

In this opening, Mary directly addresses an audience, expressing both the joy and the sorrow she feels as she is leaving. The emotional stress with which some women wrestle throughout their journals is only one factor that would influence their accommodation to the western trails. According to Julie Roy Jeffrey, the other contrary factors were the cultural versus the environmental factors--the women had a “cultural perspective which clashed with the realities of the frontier” (4). For men, pioneering and prospecting were in keeping with the masculine sphere of adventure, bread winning, breaking away, etc. The journey came at a very opportune time in their lives and was almost mythic (Schlissel Women's Diaries 13). But for women, the journey came at probably the worst time in their life cycle. Pregnancy and delivery on the trail was miserable, and watching after tiny children was fatiguing. Having to cook and wash under the open sky for months on end was contrary behavior to a woman who grew up surrounded by family and who was trained in culturally acceptable women’s roles (13). Pioneer life forced women into roles which were not the defined feminine ones laid out according to the cult of True Womanhood. According to Julie Roy Jeffrey, in order to deal with this clash, and maintain an identity in the West, a woman might modify or reject ideas of her “place”, inflate herself so the mission in the West was to civilize the frontier, or cling to familiar ideas, waiting to be able to reassert them and give them meaning once more.
(4). Within most of the journals constituting this chapter, however, there is a hint of all of these impulses. Most of the women seem rather refined, but not so much so that they don't enjoy the experience, at least in part. Jeffrey suggests that a young person might adapt better to a Western identity, and Schlissel asserts that a "rosy" attitude is not atypical of young women making the journey, for youth "carried its own resiliency of spirit and body . . . And the landscape appeared far more magnificent when one was not searching for a lost child or carrying a babe in arms as she walked" (Schlissel, Women's Diaries 150).

Lydia Allen Rudd is another young woman who expresses an optimistic and eloquent view of the journey at the outset:

Left the Missouri river for our long journey across the wild uncultivated plains and unhabitated [sic] except by the red man. As we left the river bottom and ascended the bluffs the view from them was handsome! In front of us as far as vision could reach extended the green hills covered with fine grass . . . Behind us lay the Missouri with its muddy water hurrying past as if in great haste to reach some destined point ahead all unheeding the impatient emigrants on the opposite shore at the ferrying which arrived faster than they could be conveyed over. About half a mile down the river lay a steamboat stuck fast on a sandbar. Still farther down lay the busy village of St. Joseph looking us a good bye and reminding us that we were leaving all signs of civilised life for the present. But with good courage and not one sigh of regret I mounted my pony (whose name by the way is Samy) and rode
slowly on. In going some two miles, the scene changed from bright sunshine to drenching showers of rain this was not quite agreeable for in spite of our good blankets and intentions otherwise we got some wet. The rain detained us so that we have not made but ten miles today . . . (reprinted from Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 188).

However, some women were a little less enthusiastic about the start of their journey:

We left camp this morning, and soon found that our road was as hard to travel as the proverbial one that leads to Jordan. The mud was so deep and tough that our team of four mules mired down and stuck tight on two different occasions, and we were greatly delayed in having to stop and get them out . . . Mrs. Francis H. Sawyer, May 9, 1852.

and

Took the cars at Blackberry for Aurora: arrived there about ten. When we went to take the cars, a large number of our friends came down to the depot to see us start, and after many shakes of the hand and good-byes, we left our prairie home with the intention of going to California. A friend of ours accompanied us as far as the junction and then returned. I enjoyed the ride very much, but felt very sorry to leave so many friends and dear associations, thinking that I might never see them again . . . Maria E. Norton, May 6, 1859.
To a reader of narrative, these openings are interesting because of their evaluative frame. The frame allows the reader to figure out how to respond to the journey through that woman's eyes because it communicates how the author is responding. In the openings and throughout the journal, the writer's responses can often be inferred from her descriptions of the landscape, the length of her entries, and the style of language she uses. The rest of the journal can be interpreted through a series of comparisons with the attitude of that initial entry. Lydia Allen Rudd's journal entry is interesting in that she uses figurative language (Bauman Verbal Art 17) which personifies the land she is leaving. St. Joseph can "look" and "say" goodbye and the river can be "impatient."

Personifications "allow us to make sense of phenomena in the world in human terms--terms that we can understand on the basis of our own motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics" (Lakoff and Johnson 34). Placing human characteristics on an environment that did not care about her may be her way of distinguishing between the land that she knows and which symbolizes "the civilized life" and the "wild uncultivated plains" for which she has few metaphors. Joann Levy describes an exotic metaphor of the journey and the environment so foreign to emigrants:

So dramatic an enterprise spread across so forbidding and enticing a canvas as the American West at once assumed heroic proportions. The pioneers themselves first endowed their quest with mythic qualities. For, as though the buffalo was not exotic animal enough for the landscape, gold seekers enhanced the wondrous journey with a marvelous and mysterious elephant. The
term arises from when circuses first featured elephants. A farmer, so the story went, hearing that a circus was in town, loaded his wagon with vegetables for the market there. He had never seen an elephant and very much wished to. On the way to town he encountered the circus parade, led by an elephant. The farmer was thrilled. His horses, however, were terrified. Bolting, they overturned the wagon and ruined the vegetables. ‘I don’t give a hang,’ the farmer said, ‘for I have seen the elephant’ (xvi)

The elephant became the metaphor for a journey both dangerous and adventurous.

Romanticizing about the land becomes, for Lydia, a way of looking forward to traveling through it, and a hope that it will have regard for her. However, her opening entry stands in sharp contrast to the rest of her diary, not only in terms of optimism, but also style. Crossing in 1852 at the height of the cholera epidemic, her diary is full of prosaic entries enumerating graves and discussing sickness: “May 9 . . . We passed a new grave made today . . . a man from Ohio. We also met a man that was going back he had buried his wife this morning. She died from the effects of measles” (Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 188). On May 11 she notes that her company “passed another grave to day which was made this morning. The board stated that he died of cholera. He was from Indiana” (Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 189). Interestingly, later on in that same entry, she changes subjects abruptly and her description of the landscape sounds similar to Susan Cranston’s description of the prairies: “As far as the eye can reach either way lay handsome rolling prairies not a stone a
tree nor a bush even nothing but grass and flowers meets the eye until you reach the valley of the river which is as level as the house floor . . .” (Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 189). Unlike Susan Cranston, however, she seems to find the landscape very accommodating to humans: she relates the valley to a house and even says “I would like to live here” (Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 189). But by May 14 she sees men digging a grave and remarks that it was a sad sight. In contrast to that sad sight she notes: “On the bank waiting to cross, stood a dray with five men harnessed to it bound for California. They must be some of the persevering kind I think Wanting to go to California more than I do . . . We passed Three more graves this afternoon” (Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 190). She freely states how she feels about the landscape and the journey, expressions which delimit these journals from the chronicles. Throughout this first part of the diary she and her husband have been sick. She is barely well enough to keep her diary, but she is determined to persevere despite her illness and the death all around her. She continues her journal, noting graves all the way, until October 27, when she and her husband reach Burlington, Oregon.

To pioneers, there was nothing so sorrowful or lonely than to die on the trail or for loved ones to be buried on the trail. Historian Lillian Schlissel notes that the care women give to recording graves is a major gender difference between the diaries of men and women. Women felt death to be a “personal catastrophe,” especially since they felt that their major duty was to keep the family together. Death rendered them helpless in keeping family coherence. On the other hand, men recorded only the cumulative impact of cholera and other fatalities (Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 154). Virtually all graves would
never be visited again by family members, even if there were good intentions of
doing so. Ada Millington’s family buried baby brother, George, near Carson
City, Nevada. They marked his grave and intended to go back within a year and
get his body. It was years before the youngest Millington son went back to
retrieve the body but instead found that the records had been burned and the
cemetery obliterated (15). Most families never found out what happened to the
bodies they buried; they tried to prevent Native Americans and wolves from
digging up the graves, but many pioneers report seeing open graves along the
way. Kind wagon trains would stop to reinter the remains.

Along with the constant presence of illness and death in all the journals,
chronicles included, is the presence of Native Americans. At the time, pioneers
at best tolerated the Indians and at worst hated that they were alive. All
pioneers had fears of the Indians, for they seemed to attack and commit
brutalities for unexplained reasons. From a twentieth century viewpoint,
however, it is quite apparent why the Indians attacked; their lands were being
taken and they were quickly becoming objects of the genocidal fantasy of the
whites. From the publication of A True History of the Captivity and Restoration
of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson in 1682, women feared being captured by the Indians
and forced to live like what they saw as savages. Thirteen-year-old Olive
Oatman, bound for California in 1851 with her family, was captured by the
Yavapai Indians after they killed the rest of her family. She was sold to the
Mojaves and was finally found years later. She had been tattooed on the arms
and chin, according to Mojave custom, and was very quiet (Reiter 63-64).
Susan Parrish writes of Olive’s discovery “At every opportunity [she sought] to
flee back to her Indian husband and children . . . For four years she lived with us, but she was a grieving, unsatisfied woman who somehow shook one’s belief in civilization. In time we erased the tattoo marks from her face but we could not erase the wild life from her heart. Perhaps we were wise in sending her to Oregon to her relatives. She must have forgotten as the years went by for in time she married a Mr. Fairchild, a banker from Texas” (Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 69). This woman’s thoughts about Olive Oatman sum up the clash between cultural perspectives and the realities of the frontier. It seemed unthinkable that a white woman could mourn for an Indian family, but the nineteenth-century white attitude toward the Indians was that they were wild animals that needed to be killed off or subdued so that whites could colonize the land. So it seemed impossible for a white woman to love Indian ways, and she may become a threat to white ways if she is not re-established into white society.

When the women I studied came into contact with the Indians, they mostly talked about the Indians “begging” as Susan Cranston does throughout her diary (see previous chapter). What the emigrants failed to realize was that it was common among Indian tribes to offer strangers tokens of hospitality, and many expected the same from the emigrants traveling through their lands (Schlissel Women's Diaries 118). So the behavior that the emigrants saw was pejoratively called “begging,” while the Indians saw it, to put it in other white words, as “good manners.”

Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, traveling as a young bride with her husband’s family in 1864, makes a comment equally derogatory about the Indians: “Two
days in camp, I feel like a squaw all ready [sic] and if you were to see me you would say, yes you look it." From numerous statements in her journal, readers can conclude that she is educated and well-off. Because of the clash between Eastern manners and Western frontier life, the worst thing that could happen to a refined woman would be to be reduced to living like the Indians. It would go against every feminine social and religious quality that civilization taught her. Her direct address to an audience of Easterners indicates her awareness of the fact that she is traveling into uncivilized territory among all sorts of people, the worst of which, to her, were Indians. Calling attention to her looks could be a way of excusing herself from strict adherence to social norms regarding appearance, and at the same time be a way of keeping herself from succumbing to the dirt and dust of the trails. As long as she is at least aware of her looks, she can try to adhere to eastern standards.

Mary Warner fights another adaptation that would bring her a step closer to being uncivilized—women’s bloomers. The costume, introduced in 1851, consisted of a loose tunic-dress, extending to just below the knee, worn over baggy, ankle-length trousers. Named after famous dress-reformer Amelia Bloomer, the costume caused quite a stir in America and abroad. The bloomer was designed in opposition to the restrictive dress at the time—tight bodices and large hoop skirts. Bloomer advocates considered the costume healthier because it did not restrict movement (Steele 146). But bloomer critics declared them feminist and masculine, two qualities unbecoming a woman at the time (Steele 146); women seemed to be endeavoring to “wear the trousers,” an act which was threatening to the patriarchal nineteenth-century man. Bloomers
were also seen as alluring—if hoop skirts symbolized the unapproachability of women, then bloomers symbolized the opposite (Laver 184). Upper class women refused to wear them; however, because bloomers allowed mobility, many women adopted the dress on the trails as practical wear. But Mary Warner, a wealthy woman who presumably wished to maintain her status even on the trail, refused to wear them:

The rest of our women folks have put on their bloomers. Well I put on mine and soon took them off. Celia and I went away down the bluff and there we practiced with them. Celia concluded she had the courage to wear hers, but not I. So I got back into my other clothes. Just think of it—brave enough to cross the plains but not brave enough to wear bloomers. Well when I got back in camp they all laughed at me, and I, you know, don’t like to be laughed at. So this was one of my small troubles. Mrs. Lord, the man’s wife who is in our company, called me proud, said I wanted to look better than the rest, etc. but then I said I would never wear them as long as my other two dresses last.

To a middle class, educated woman, wearing bloomers was not only a sign of a drop in social status (a trial worse than a trip across the plains), but they were also a sign of giving up some femininity, a concept that Julie Roy Jeffrey suggests would be disastrous to a pioneering woman. Given the times, women’s identity was to be highly feminine and the high moral character of the house. Much of this identity was reflected in the fashions women wore. Because of the journey, there was neither house nor town to create the social
context, so if the fashion was also taken away, then women’s social identity was too (Jeffrey 23; Haynes 33). Refusal to wear bloomers or any other adaptation to the environment could also have been a code to reject the new environment (Haynes 31). Though Mary Warner begins her diary quite high spirited, the juxtaposition of her clothing and the environment could point to other feelings (Radner 13). Again, she directly addresses an audience that adheres to Eastern standards of dress, calling attention to the fact that she will not wear bloomers as an indication of her desire to uphold Eastern standards. Her continual reference to her looks and her dress could also be a way of addressing an audience of friends and family who was skeptical of her ability to uphold these standards.

Evidence of the high value placed on Eastern clothing comes further in Mary Warner’s diary. While in Salt Lake City, she and her sister-in-law, Celia, sold clothes for high prices: “Celia took her white crepe shawl in with her and a woman gave her 12 dollars for it. I sold them some ribbon and two dresses I had for a fabulous sum” (May 30, 1864). Women’s fashion and appearance was probably the biggest battleground on which the clash between culture and frontier was fought. It was difficult for women to part with their fashions because of the close connection with sex role. To deviate with the norm communicated that a woman had relaxed her standards. However, in Mary Warner’s case, because the majority of women in her party adopted the bloomers, it was she who was considered outside the norm. She did not seem to mind whether or not the others wore theirs, though. Other pioneer women did appear to be judgmental: “We left encampment at an early hour and took a long walk with
Mrs. Singletary, whom, not withstanding her bloom er dress, we found to be a sensible pleasant woman” (Quoted in Faragher, Women and Men 106). Mrs. Francis Sawyer is interested in the bloomers, but does not adopt them: “We have been traveling, for several days, in company with an old gentlemen, and his family. The daughter is dressed in bloomer costume--pants, short skirt and red-top boots. I think it is a very appropriate dress for a trip like this. So many ladies wear it, that I almost wish that I was so attired myself” (May 23, 1852). Mrs. Sawyer, too, cannot bring herself to wear bloomers. She cannot even bring herself to make a definite statement of a wish to. She has to qualify it with the word “almost.” Wearing dresses adheres to standards of the East, and this behavior is paralleled in her language about what she wears.

Regardless of whether or not they wore bloomers, women worried about their appearance on the trail, especially when nearing their destination. “Now as we get nearer civilized conditions, take stock of our clothes and our appearances . . . Oh My, how the people come and look at us and stare at us immigrants” (Mary Parkhurst Warner, June 20, 1864). Interestingly, her journal parallels her current state. She writes: “June 20, 1864. This old journal is about done for book filled, paper gone, pencil worn out.” For a woman too refined to wear bloomers and who had traveled in a buggy most of the time, the journey must have taken its toll. Her diary is the main link she has with civilization, and her great efforts to preserve civilized life on the trail wore her and her diary out.

While in the chronicle diary it seems almost as if the writer were traveling alone, in the literary journal, there is a whole cast of characters. Other women,
however, seem to be most often mentioned, which is evidence that women saw themselves as traveling primarily in the company of other women. Mary E. Parkhurst Warner quite often talks of her sister-in-law, Celia, and the companionship they have on the journey. Early on, they get "pie hungry" and walk ahead of the rest of the party together. Unfortunately, the house they were headed for had no pie within. To a woman, being alone on the prairies was difficult. Men's concerns on the journey were somewhat different, and they consulted with other men. If you were a woman alone, no one would help with the cooking, with childbirth, even with relieving yourself on the journey, which presumably was done behind the curtain of other women's skirts. After rereading this diary entry, it dawned on me that because of the impropriety of writing about such intimate women's behaviors, searching for pie could possibly be a coded message for a search for something else. They are two women going off by themselves on a search for something that is a product of the women's sphere--a pie. What better way to convey a message having to do with the women's sphere, a message which might have involved relieving herself or even menstruation? The writers mention other inconveniences and discomforts on the journey, so it seems that they would long to be able to express the inconvenience of finding a place to relieve themselves. Coding the expression may have been a way to do it.

Mary hated being alone even for part of a day: "I rode all morning alone in the carriage. In the afternoon prevailed upon Celia to ride with me. Alone all day with nothing to talk to but dog and horses. Just imagine the lonesomeness of the situation, but then we have our thoughts all to ourselves" (May 12, 1864).
She calls attention to a reading audience, telling them to imagine what it could be like day to day on the trails. Being a middle to upper class woman, she presumably would have been involved in much social activity back East. However, her last statement points to another aspect of everyday life on the trails--there is little privacy.

Celia and Mary often rode together in a carriage or on horses, but probably the activity that brought them and most women on the journey together was cooking. While their party had a hired cook, he was often drunk, so the women would take over. Mary speaks of not only Celia but also her niece, Mary Eliza Warner, helping with the cooking:

I have never told you, I think, of the buffalo chips we pick up for fuel. Many a meal we now have to cook with them and dry grass. Celia, Mary and I start as soon as we camp to get them, and indeed we have to hustle some to keep the fire going. Bake biscuit--cook bacon, coffee--getting tough I can tell you. (April 25, 1864)

This was a typical meal on the plains, and a typical reaction to it. She describes having to cook with buffalo chips as tough, addressing an audience who probably would never have to even think about using buffalo chips. Her list of menu items also indicates how weary she is getting of the same foods on the journey. Again, being well-off, she was most likely used to bigger meals of more variety, but food on the trails had to last six months without spoiling. Flour, sugar, coffee, beans, and bacon were about the only foods that were reliable for the journey.
Since many of these journal writers were well-off, they traveled in large companies with their families who owned large numbers of cows or horses. Maria Elliot Norton did not have to cook, either, and she had a horse at her disposal:

I must give you a description of the way they did while stopping. Remember, that it was the first day that I had dined with them. Jerry, one of the cooks, gets out of the wagon and gets the milk can, carries it across the road, sets it down, then gets the bread and cakes and tin basins, and all of us sit down on the green grass, and each take a basin and spoon and partake with a good relish. I thought it was as good as picnics at home. We had plenty of fun to keep our spirits up. Dinner over, I asked Eddie to saddle my horse, Kit, which he willingly did . . . (May 27, 1859).

Many of the hardships of the trail could be minimized if the emigrants were well off. Maria’s diary, as well as other literary-type journals, is full of self reflexive language that signals an audience. Constantly writing to a particular audience keeps these women connected with social roles and comforts they enjoyed in the East. The stories they tell conjure an interested audience, one who can’t imagine the hardships, but who also appreciates the journey being animated for them. The consciousness of a reading audience that these writers have is indicated in the performance keys used by these women, whereas the chronicles hardly contained any aspects of performance and thus construction of identity.
Another construction these diarists partake in is the landscape. They construct the landscape in language familiar to them, imposing agricultural and religious order on it. This preoccupation with the environment is present because it controls their fate, as well as reminds them that they are moving farther and farther from home. When encountering a new wonder, diary entries may become lengthy. As the same landscape stretched over days, the emigrants became tired of it. Early in the journey, Mary Warner describes the country as a “rolling prairie--it is quite warm and pleasant.” Not four days later, she writes, “the scenery is rolling prairie and gets monotonous” (April 19, 1864). By April 22 and 23 she writes “Nothing doing, traveling getting monotonous . . . Am not feeling well enough to write in my journal today. Nothing of interest to write . . . Nothing but one vast plain.” It seems that her descriptions of the prairie may be reflective of her physical and mental state, because the very next day she writes “A warm beautiful day--a beautiful country.” Her entry that day, though not all about the landscape, is much longer than the previous days’ entries. By April 25, she describes driving her carriage and encountering a herd of antelope, and she ends the entry with “our road more varied today and met with more interest.” Her entries indicate that she needs a lot of stimuli to keep her from getting bored.

About one-third of the way into the journey, emigrants came upon a series of natural wonders. Courthouse Rock was the first rock formation that they encountered. Mary Warner describes it as “a great big house built of rock.” Chimney Rock, a five hundred foot rock formation, was the next “curiosity.” Mary Warner did not comment much until she got to Scott’s Bluffs, about which she
wrote, "I have seen nothing so beautiful on my journey as they. We were looking like some old castle or tower and such a beautiful green level garden in front & the river which looks like it ran at the foot of the rocks, but is really five miles from them. We can see this beautiful sight fifty miles from us" (May 6, 1864). Her description of a castle and garden supports Annette Kolodny's assertion that metaphors of the garden, used by promotionalists to make the frontier attractive to women, became a collective metaphor with which women could encounter and accommodate themselves to the West. According to Kolodny, the metaphors are "psychic strategies for survival that were, for pioneer women, no less crucial than the imaginative structures through which generations of men followed in the footsteps of Daniel Boone . . ." (The Land Before Her 10). The metaphor imposes culture on nature, thus taming the wilderness through language.

Maria Elliot Norton describes the bluffs: "They are the most magnificent structures of the kind we have seen. I thought, how much more beautiful are the works of nature than are those of art!" (July 10, 1859). Though this statement puts nature above culture, the nature she is referring to is equal to God, not a savage wilderness. It was not uncommon for emigrants to be awed by the works of nature. John Mack Faragher says of emigrant descriptions of landscape: "To the emigrants the West through which they passed included both the most beautiful and most desolate sights they had ever seen. Every person seemed to adhere to a naturalistic aesthetic standard which appreciated the landscape as God's artistic masterpiece" (14). Their mode of expressing their awe, however, comes from their literary experience.
Both of these responses, landscape-as-garden, and landscape-as-God’s work describe coping orientations that the emigrants needed along the way. Not only did the women need to envision the landscape as an accommodating, domestic garden, but referring to God as the creator of it provided them with spiritual comfort. It also reminded them of their part in the journey—to help civilize and cultivate these wild lands. Religion played a major role in providing comfort in the cycle of days and of life on the trail. All writers include Sunday observances in their diaries; most of the time the entire wagon party would “lay over” on the Sabbath.

Though all the journals cover the same topics, the number of instances of a given topic the writer dwells on and the way in which the topic is presented helps to construct the individual identity of the woman writing. For a reader, the voice and self put forward is more easily “read” than in the chronicles, where the reader must do a lot of work creating an identity for the writer. Though the journey seems quite similar in some respects, by reading these topical and stylistic cues, each journal and writer can also be seen as unique, rescuing these women from anonymity.

Mrs. Francis H. Sawyer dwells on the road and its suitability for travel, and she immediately sets up a frame in her first entry which reflects her difficulty, not only with the physical road, but metaphorically with the journey itself: “We left camp this morning, and soon found that our road was as hard to travel as the proverbial one that leads to Jordan. The mud was so deep and tough that our team of four mules mired down and stuck tight on two different occasions . . .” (May 9, 1852). The second day was no better: “May 10--We
started out this morning with renewed courage, hoping that we might not be visited by similar trials and difficulties to those of yesterday, but our hopes and desires went to naught. Our mules mired again... As mentioned before, Mrs. Sawyer is a well-off and pampered young woman, and the exaggeration in the description of the difficulty of the trails points toward not only an unfamiliarity with discomfort, but could also be taken as a code that she really did not want to be on the journey. Her party has tried to take with them comforts of home that she is used to—a feather bed and a single horse carriage for her use on the trail—perhaps to lessen the shock to her refined sensibilities. At the beginning of the May 10th entry, however, is a sort of noble and courageous persistence—"keeping a stiff upper lip." She soon gives herself away as to how she feels about the situation, which she seems to blame on the landscape and local farmers: "We find some very bad branches, brooks and ravines to cross. It seems that the farmers in this section take no interest in improving their roads, and this makes it so disagreeable for emigrants. It commenced raining this evening, and everything is very gloomy and unpleasant." This seems to be another clash between Eastern refinement and the uncivilized West that so many emigrant women faced. Her comments about the farmers indicate that perhaps she finds them beneath the civilized area that she is from in Kentucky, where farmers apparently are interested in improving their roads and making the landscape generally agreeable to whites.

Mrs. Sawyer also speaks quite often of the road becoming monotonous and tiresome, and of the journey becoming wearisome. "Today has been a very warm one, but nothing startling has occurred to break the monotony of the trip"
(May 24). And again on May 28th, “Nothing of startling importance happened today. The same old monotony--endless prairies.” From her elevated language and her biblical and classical allusions--at one point she refers to how “Morpheus cozily wrapped us all in his arms last night”--it is apparent that she is quite educated and it is equally apparent that for the most part the trails lack the kind of intellectual and social stimulus that she is used to. She is highly aware, too, of what makes a good and interesting story--one that perhaps is indicative of the West that Eastern friends, eager to hear first hand accounts of the exciting and hard journey, would be expecting. If nothing happened on the trail, she summed it up in a few sentences.

Because Mrs. Sawyer is traveling with three men, it is no wonder that she enjoys female company when she comes across it. Her refinement and her adherence to social graces is apparent in this realm as well. Whenever she mentions other women, she politely refers to them as ladies, placing them within a feminine realm where they are mentioned in relation to their husbands, children, and where they are performing domestic chores. On a trail full of great difficulty and then great monotony, meeting these women must have been like encountering islands of civilization and kinship.

Mrs. Sawyer writes her last entry on August 17 with an expression of relief: “glad we are, that we are at last, at the end of our journey safe and well, though we are tired and need rest.” It is appropriate for her to mention the end of the trail and being tired, since these two themes surface throughout her journal, painting overall a rather negative, though not altogether unhappy, picture of the journey for her.
In contrast to Mrs. Sawyer's repetition of the discomfort and monotony of the trails, Mary Elizabeth Parkhurst Warner seems overall to enjoy herself. The self she portrays in her journal is fun-loving and playful, much like the self that Susan Cranston exhibits in her letters. She approaches the journey and the hardships it brings with a sense of humor about herself and an interest in the adventure of it, almost as if she is a participant-observer on an anthropological field study, describing something foreign to her social circle. She too appears to be wealthy, and is traveling in a party where there is a cook, where they carry boards and a white cloth with them to set up a table for dining, and where she drives a buggy “with a fine set of dapple gray.”

The first night of encampment, she writes a lengthy entry describing camp and the members of the train, presumably for the friends she has promised her journal to. She sets up a vivid scene--sitting around the campfire, describing the emigrant family wagon and the supplies for the train. This is also the entry in which she talks about trying on bloomers, only to discard them (mentioned earlier in this chapter). At the end of this entry, her comments highlight the contrast between the life she is used to and life on the trails:

I must not forget my first night in camp. No I never will, but I meant to write I must not forget to tell you of it--horses were tied to wagons & stakes all around us, and they chewed and breathed and whinnied all night long. By morning I was nearly in a nervous fit. But of course I will get used to this (April 13, 1864).

She addresses an audience who knows her and presumably is used to the same kind of lifestyle she has been used to, and who probably can’t imagine
what camping would be like. In the act of writing the last line, she wills herself to accept the trail and its discomforts.

Her descriptions frame, overall, a pleasant and even humorous picture of the emigrants and their adventures. From many diaries, the reader does not get a sense of the mobile community trying to cover 2500 miles at the pace of 20 miles a day. It is hard to imagine the kind of patience with the others in your party it would take especially when the days get monotonous or there is a difference of opinion about what trail to take. Most members of the Warner train seem to get along well; however, Mrs. Warner does provide for the reader an antagonist who has conflicts with the other women in the party. We meet Mrs. Lord, a seemingly unpleasant and jealous woman, in the opening of the diary, when she accuses Mary of being proud. She is mentioned again on April 24 when “A Frenchman came riding on horseback into our camp, asking many questions, and not at all liking his manner, Warner told him we were all well armed and Mrs. Lord took the occasion to exhibit her little gun she always wore at her side. Sometimes I really get afraid she might accidentally [sic] shoot some of us.” Her comment suggests her distrust of Mrs. Lord. She is mentioned again on April 26th, when Mary writes of her own preoccupation with and fear of Indians (another antagonist Mary provides for her audience): “Everything in the distance I imagine are droves of them. We are nearing the land they usually roam, so say those that have been here before. Like my friend Mrs. Lord, I keep close to my gun and dog.” The reference to Mrs. Lord as her friend appears to be polite, but facetious in light of previous comments.
Mary also politely but indirectly refers to Mrs. Lord on April 29th when she writes that the cook is getting tired and she and Celia help him, but “none of the women seem to think it their duty to help the cook.” Mrs. Lord is not mentioned again until May 22nd, and again, Mary’s words do not paint her favorably, “We played ball and Mrs. Lord got jealous of her husband and made him come sit by her. Think of it, jealous of the poor man.” On June 13th the wagon party divided because Mr. Lord and Mr. Warner had a disagreement. Despite the division, Mr. Lord

...Came to us and said he was very sorry that things had turned out so we could not finish our journey together. Said he knew his wife was to blame for many things that had happened. So many unpleasant things she had said and done. He gave us, and especially me, kind words, while she seemed to have it in for me at the beginning, never helping cook when in a hurry, but finding fault with whatever we did. We were also sorry for this unpleasantness between us.

When the Warner train found that they had almost no one left, one of the men revealed that it was because Mrs. Lord had hired the rest of the men to leave the Warner train. Over the next few days Mary describes how first they pass the Lord train and then how the Lord train passes them, each trying to get ahead to the better camping spot. On June 17th, Mary mentions Mrs. Lord for the last time: “And one thing so laughable, when Mrs. Lord is in her buggy and our dog Tige sees her he will run after her and growl as if he would eat her up. I have been afraid she might shoot him with her little gun she carries.”
This ongoing sketch of the relationship Mary had with Mrs. Lord is only one kind of sketch she provides for the reader throughout her diary. She creates other sketches of life on the journey, focusing on humorous occurrences or ways to pass the time. She manages to report even some of the more harrowing stories with a humorous twist. These stories set up a positive frame for interpreting her experiences. Mary has an unusual number of stories about Indians:

April 18th . . . In the afternoon we did a little washing--squaws sitting around. These Indians are friendly, called the Elkhorn Indians . . . One of the squaws took a great liking to Warner and gave him a blue bone ring. Well I was not a bit jealous, though she was quite good looking. . .April 21 . . . One day some Indians came in our camp and one bright looking one wanted to buy the pretty white squaw [Mary is referring to herself in the third person], telling Warner he would give several ponies for her, and Tige the dog stood by and growled at him and the Indian got really afraid and left--and the pretty white squaw was glad she had her faithful friend. If we play ball when camped, if it so happened the ball went amiss and hit me, you would hear a growl from Tige. . .May 7 . . . One tall fine looking Indian came up to my buggy before I got out and wanted to shake hands. Well of course I shook hands and shook otherwise. And then what do you think, asked Warner to sell me for ponies. Warner said two ponies. I said no and did not make a move to get out, then he offered three ponies talking all the
time to me, although I did not understand a word, then he took hold of my shawl to make me understand to get out. About this time I got frightened and really was so hysterical, began to cry. So he went and got me a pair of moccasins and gave me and went away. I got out of my buggy and got into Mary's wagon out of sight. Of course they all laughed about it. No laugh with me though, I am so afraid of them.

These incidents point toward the whites' sense of intellectual and civilized superiority over the Native Americans, though throughout her diary, Mary speaks of being afraid of the Indians. She was traveling at a time when Indians were becoming more and more resentful of the white emigration, and when whites resented Indians for standing in the way of western expansion. These entries paint a somewhat humorous image of the different cultures when taken in context of the times, though from a twentieth century view, there is an arrogance about the way whites treated Native Americans. After the first Indian wanted to buy Mary, Warner must have thought it quite funny that another Indian wanted to buy her, and so joined in the bargaining as a joke. Mary's response to her husband's actions are hard to decipher. She does not overtly say anything against him, but she makes it a point to say she was not about to laugh.

There are also examples where she reports a mishap or an accident, but her disposition seems to be such that she can turn the event into something bearable if not pleasant. In today's terms, you could say that she is the type of person who, when life gives her lemons, she makes lemonade:
April 20 Crossed the Platte river--forded it partly and ferry. The team I was driving, something got the matter with the wagon and for six long hours sat in the river--water to the wagon bed--and strange to say did not get frightened. It seemed as if the river was alive with people. Well it took all day to get the train across, and if you will believe, made tatting which will send you as a souvenir from Platte River.

In the midst of this unpleasant situation she uses her energy on tatting (making lace), rather than fear, although the tatting could be a way of coding her fear.

On June 27 in Nevada, her diary ends abruptly: “As the rest of our journey will be very monotonous I shall keep no journal of everyday events. I get so tired when night comes that it is an effort for me to take my pencil.” After writing lengthy entries describing pastimes, stampedes, and conflicts, this abrupt ending is untimely and disappointing to a reader curious about the rest of the journey.

Maria Elliot Norton, traveling in 1859, has an outlook and attitude toward the journey that is somewhere in between Mary Elizabeth Parkhurst Warner’s and Mrs. Francis Sawyer’s. She, like Mrs. Sawyer and Mrs. Warner, seems to be well-off and educated, as her family is taking a large herd of cattle west with them, and her language is often elevated. Her family starts the journey on railroad cars, a luxury many did not have. Her numerous comments about sod and log houses indicate that she looks down on frontier life, seeming to define it as lower class. She, too, begins her diary recounting some of the “hardships” for a young woman like her:
...After the cars stopped, the conductor conducted us to his hotel, where we found very poor accommodations. We could not be allowed the privilege of sitting up, but were told by a surly-looking fellow that he expected that two or three stage loads were coming in, and they wanted the room and we must go to bed; so we told him that we would retire. So he showed us our sleeping apartments, which were not very large, but we piled in and slept till morning. We at last got up and ready for a start, but the miserable fellow was bound to make us all the trouble that he could, but at last got off at about seven in the morning (May 9, 1859).

Like Mrs. Sawyer’s opening entries, in the midst of the “discomfiture” derived from the shaking of the cars, her party “kept up good courage, occasionally singing some good piece for our diversion” (May 9, 1859).

In contrast to this initial story, Maria often writes humorous descriptions of life on the trail. Near the beginning of her journal, she relates how part of her company was to meet up with the other part in Eddyville, Iowa but the men were delayed because of bad roads. When they finally do arrive, Maria describes the scene thus:

At last, after we had been there about a week the men came to town, and I can tell you there was great rejoicing on the part of those that had husbands. But as I had none I stood a silent spectator. Oh, that meeting! It is engraved on my mind so indelibly that it will never be erased. Such hugging and kissing I guess was never done before. And do you believe it, the men came in the
dreadful rain, so anxious were they to see their better halves, as it had been all of five weeks since they had seen them, and some had just enlisted in the bonds of matrimony. So of course they were excusable. Our friends soon had a nice supper prepared for our special benefit. And nice times we had too, ice cream and everything nice--but it will not do to particularize (May 10, 1859).

Maria Elliot is a young woman who is of marrying age, and she seems to be amused by the couples' behavior upon reunion, perhaps indicating discomfort with the fact that she is not married yet. By using the pronoun "you", it is evident that she is aware of a reading audience who might appreciate a humorous description of the scene. Her last comment is quite interesting since her seventy page diary is the lengthiest I came across.

Throughout her diary, there are moments where her descriptions capture the scene and reveal more about her. While reading the diary, I found that the times she uses flowery/metaphoric language or "waxes poetic" are times when she is describing some sort of human emotion/experience--mirth (as seen above), religion and sorrow. These passages contrast with some of her other passages, which are prosaic and contain abbreviated sentence structures, often omitting the subject.

In a few passages, when speaking of God, she personifies nature praising Him: "Rode some time alone reflecting on the works of nature and of God. Everything seemed to speak of the goodness of him who made all things" (Sunday, May 29, 1859), and "It is a most beautiful morning. The birds are singing sweetly as if their hearts were full of praise" (Friday, June 24th, 1859).
She repeats this same personification on July 20th: "The sun shines brightly and the birds sing sweetly, as if their hearts were full of praise." When speaking of nature, she gives credit to God as creator: "I thought, how much more beautiful are the works of nature than were those of art!" (Monday, July 10th, 1859) and, a few days later, "Saw many beautiful places, made more beautiful because formed by nature" (Monday, July 18, 1859). The next day she writes: "I very often think of the goodness of God, in giving wood and water to weary thirsty travelers on their journey to California." She gives credit to God for their escape from the Indians and for their health: "We were not troubled with the Indians last night, but through the mercy of God are still alive" (Sunday, August 21, 1859), and "We are all in our usual health and spirits this morning, and I for one feel to bless the Giver of All Good" (Friday, August 26th, 1859). These passages not only reflect some of her elevated language, they also reflect her strong belief in God.

Her belief in God is also reflected in the language she uses to describe times of sorrow; for example, a little boy in their company dies along the way:

Our camp was made the scene of sorrow this morning. Little Delly is no more. He died at seven; died very easily in Carrie's arms. His parents took his death very hard. I tried to console them; said that little Delly was much happier in Heaven than here on this earth; that they must prepare to follow him . . . We dressed him in his little white dress, and he did indeed look beautiful, with a wreath of flowers on his head. He looked as he was sleeping. It was a very solemn day to us all. About one we were ready to
proceed on our solemn march to the tomb. When we arrived, we stopped a little distance from the grave yard. Then we all proceeded by twos to the grave. Had the 90th Psalm, sang a hymn, and had a prayer. We took a last look at his beautiful face, and then consigned him to the house appointed for all the living (Thursday, June 2nd, 1859).

She uses similar language in finding a man killed by Indians: “The poor dead man was washed, a white shirt put upon him, then laid upon a board, and consigned to the silent tomb, with not a relative to follow him to his last resting place. He leaves a wife and two children in Iowa to mourn his loss” (Sunday, August 21st, 1859).

Her tendency to use flowery language occurs at other sorrowful times, such as when she thinks about how far away from home she is: “The Missouri River is a very muddy river, and it is about a half a mile across. As the boat started, I bade farewell to Iowa, thinking we were going farther and farther away from loved ones” (Saturday, June 11, 1859), and “The sun shines very pleasantly this morning, and reminds me of the very many pleasant Sabbath mornings that I have attended church at home. Oh, how I wish I could be with my loved ones today, and hear the truths proclaimed from the lips of our beloved pastor. While I write tears fill my eyes to think of the days that are passed never more to return,” (Sunday, July 3rd, 1859).

An interesting contrast to her sense of melodrama is her snobbery, evidenced in her comments about buildings and towns, the Mormons, and the Indians. Her deprecating comments commence with her description of the
"poor accommodations" of May 9th. She continues by making veiled digs at the people and the towns of Iowa, and she overtly proclaims her contempt for the Indians and Mormons.

Her sense of self is derived, like the other women’s in this chapter, from an identity and a status in the East that claimed superiority in class and religion over lower classes and religions which were not mainstream. The Mormons were seen as violating social proprieties by taking several wives. This sense of superiority and the self-worth it indicates is present in the very style of writing. They are conscious of themselves as writers and thus they become the subject of the diary, unlike in the chronicles where the journey is the subject, rather than the writer. The following chapter also explores the writer as subject and the identity created in reminiscences about the overland journey.
CHAPTER 4

REMINISCENCES

The third category of writing, the reminiscence or recollection, is marked by a highly self-conscious construction of the characters and the activities on the trail. Because these authors are consciously writing to an audience, making a story about the experience that will pass the “so what” test (Labov 366), they are carefully crafting their experiences. Their narratives become a string of incidents that roughly follow the chronology of the journey, rather than the writing of the minutiae of everyday life on the trails. The context for the long narrative is set at the beginning as an orientation section because the writer is highly aware that her audience may reach beyond immediate family members. Adrietta Applegate Nixon, writing her narrative to be published, was very aware of the distance between herself and possible readers, so includes a genealogy of her mother’s family in her narrative. An obvious difference between the reminiscence and the diary that affects the construction of the narrative is that the author of the reminiscence knows what happens in the end of her story and directs the reader’s response at every turn. The diarist, on the other hand, does not know the outcome of the journey, and the diary becomes a series of surprises for the writer and reader. As demonstrated in the last chapter,
however, the diarist may, through the tone of her writing and her repetitions, create a code which can tell the reader about the self presented in the diary and about how the diarist feels about the journey.

In a recollection, the fact of its existence tells the reader about how the writer felt about the journey. She probably would not have written about the journey if she found it objectionable or forgettable. On the contrary, most writers took great pride in their own “pioneer spirit” and found the journey to be generally pleasant. Catherine Haun writes “Upon the whole I enjoyed the trip, spite of its hardships and dangers and the fear and dread that hung as a pall over every hour. Although not so thrilling as were the experiences of many who suffered in reality what we feared, but escaped, I like every other pioneer, love to live over again, in memory those romantic months, and revisit, in fancy, the scenes of the journey” (Schlissel, Women’s Diaries 185). She makes a claim about every other pioneer that may or may not be true, but Lydia Milner Waters certainly agrees with her: “In these dull times it [her written recollection of the journey] has taken me back to some pleasant scenes” (Waters 59).

Though the journey was a hard one for everyone, it was looked back upon as exciting and something that could be told as a story. Mrs. Adrietta Applegate Hixon is so enthusiastic about the story, that she commits to paper her mother’s story of the crossing when she was 9 years old. Adrietta heard it so many times as a child and as an adult that she took over her mother’s role of tradition-bearer. She felt so confident in this role that she decided to reconstruct her mother’s oral narrative on paper.
Reminiscing and hearing the reminiscences of these pioneers was popular even shortly after the emigration. By the 1880's Hubert Howe Bancroft and his wife were interviewing pioneers about their experiences in order to preserve them. Bancroft wrote a history of California and the manuscript library at U.C. Berkeley, housing many of these diaries, is named after him. Many recollections were printed in periodicals such as Transactions of the Oregon Pioneer Association as early as 1887 and as late as 1928. In the 1920's and 1930's, the Oregon Journal printed interviews that journalist Fred Lockley had with ninety-nine pioneer women. Many more reminiscences are part of private collections.

For Oregon pioneers, the journey was the single unifying event which described their identities, and the identity of the community in the West. In this way, the narratives woven from the experience could be considered as part of the pioneers' life story. Charlotte Linde's definition of life story is useful in discussing these pioneer recollections though included in her definition is an ultimate rejection of the resemblance of life story to journals and diaries because they are not oral. As I have demonstrated, however, I do see applications of oral narrative theories for written diaries. Linde defines life story in two ways, which she calls the "technical" and the "nontechnical" (20). The technical definition:

A life story consists of all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual during the course of his/her lifetime that satisfy the following two criteria:
1. The stories and associated discourse units contained in the life story have as their primary evaluation a point about the speaker, not a general point about the way the world is.

2. The stories and associated discourse units have extended reportability; that is, they are tellable and are told and retold over the course of a long period of time (21).

In the nontechnical definition she uses the phrases, “what events have made me what I am,” and “what you must know about me to know me” (20). In pioneer recollections the teller is someone who has had an incredible life-changing experience. She has moved away from all that she knew before to a new, unknown place. The journey is also the psychological struggle between “who I was” and “who I am becoming,” a phenomenon which was discussed in terms of women’s social identity in the previous chapter. Telling the tale of the adventure over and over is a way of reinforcing what the pioneer has become, and her pride in overcoming hardships.

Most of the reminiscences that I came across were written at least twenty years after the fact, and the writers were in their sixties and older. All of them felt the need to tell their story about a time gone by and about a person no longer full of spirit and strength. In a folkloric study of the elderly, Patrick Mullen uses the concepts of life history and life review to explore the function of reminiscences, personal narratives and other forms of expression. He finds that “one of the integrative functions of life review is the maintenance of identity: The events and activities that are surveyed are ones that were important in the establishing of the identity of the individual. By telling stories about past
experiences or using a skill learned earlier in life, the old person reintegrates that past identity in the present, projecting it as part of his or her present self image” (18). Though the reminiscences I collected are only one story in a pioneer life that I have no other access to, the event was significant enough to establish a strong identity for that person, and the telling of the story serves to integrate her past identity with her present one, as well as linking her with a specific community. The telling of the story to an audience serves “important personal and communal functions: it establishes the identity of the individual elderly person, and it connects one generation to another, passing on or reconstructing traditions that are important for survival of the community” (Mullen 18). Of the reminiscences I read, the one that serves as strong evidence for the importance of the pioneer tradition for the community is Adrietta Applegate Hixon’s recounting of her mother’s journey across the plains. The very fact that she tries to write it as her mother would tell it to her over the years shows that she not only values her mother’s experiences, but also the history and the culture that she inherited from her stalwart pioneer mother.

Adrietta Hixon’s recollection is a unique rendering of the journey across the plains. She wrote the manuscript in the 1920’s and it was published in 1947 under the title On to Oregon!... A True Story of a Young Girl’s Journey Into the West. It was edited by Waldo Taylor, a resident of the small town of Weiser, Idaho, which is where Adrietta finally settled with her husband and family. Presumably an acquaintance, or possibly the editor for the Weiser American, Taylor explains Adrietta’s motivation to write: “For many years she had been resolving in her mind the project of setting down in writing the story of
her mother's journey to Oregon, and now, realizing that Time was fast slipping by, she set about the task; a task joyfully undertaken. The story would serve not only as a memorial to her mother, but also be for the pleasure of her children and all those who love the West, and its tales of the pioneers" (Introduction). She does more than report the story of her mother's overland crossing; she transforms the events into an artfully devised narrative. She chooses to set the story in the context of a storytelling event in which her mother, Mary Ellen Todd Applegate, is the grandmother relating the story to her daughter's (Adrietta's) two boys. In her opening, she establishes a usual context in which the story is told, thinking to narrate the story as close to the truthful context as she can:

In the little city of Weiser, which is in the far southwestern corner of Idaho, Grandma Applegate sat peacefully at her window. Her eyes wandered out to the low lands of Dead Ox Flat and the far hills beyond the Snake river in Oregon, while the declining sun cast its slowly shifting rays of gold over that thirsty, sage-covered expanse. In her mind she was reliving the long journey that had taken her through this very land so long ago. She was thinking of her father and her other loved ones who had made that journey with her when the cheery voices of children aroused her from her memories:

‘Ah, here are my two boys!' She smiled as they rushed in on her reveries.
‘Grandma, you look just as though you were thinking a story,’ the older one said, looking into her eyes that still held a trace of a faraway look.

‘Tell us about when you came here in the big wagon,’ pleaded the other.

‘It’s a long story, dears, but sit down and I’ll tell you the first part. Then some other day I will tell you more, until in time you will know it all.’

The children promised to come each day, until the telling be finished. And this is her story, just as she told it--(Hixon 5).

Adrietta performs the story in as far as the original oral story can be performed in a written narrative, setting up an interpretive frame within which her message is communicated (Bauman Verbal Art 9). The “declining sun” casting its “rays of gold” sets up a frame that suggests that the quality of memory is a golden glow, and the narrative she is about to tell is nostalgic of the young West as well as her young self. Framing directs “attention to the double grounding of an extraordinary world opened up in the ordinary” (Hufford 532). She sets up this frame through including the usual context in her re-creation of her mother’s narrative. Then, having taken over the role of tradition bearer from her mother, Adrietta begins her narrative with an appeal to tradition (conjuring the figure of her mother), a key to performance in which the performer takes responsibility for the communicative act that has a standard of reference in the past (Bauman Verbal Art 21). The context she sets her story within sets up two frames of reference: one conveys messages to the audience in the story, and
one conveys the messages to a large reading audience. The use of the third person creates the distance she needs to invite the reader into this pioneer family, but her use of the real names of the family members keeps it intimate for the family audience. The third person also suggests the distance in time and culture between the narrated events and the narrative event, a distance that she is a part of because it is not her own story. However, the fact that Adrietta is writing it and even claims competence in telling it—“this is her story, just as she told it”—communicates to readers that she accepts and believes the ideology of the strength and the spirit of pioneers in days gone by.

In stories that the elderly tell, they often want to portray their youth as being the “good old days” when things were harder but better and the people were stronger and had stronger sense of community and the value of things. Many of Fred Lockley’s elderly interviewees talk about “how girls have it easier now” (in the 1920’s). The two elderly people involved in this story—grandma within the story and Adrietta the author of the story—both agree about the “good old days.” She would not be writing this story as a sort of tribute to her mother if she did not believe in its message. To strengthen her message, she not only “performs” her mother’s story competently, but she also assigns it chapters in order to raise it to the status of published literary works. Her message is all the stronger because of the performance, but she may have unwittingly made it into a fictionalized tale, which to her was most likely disastrous since her title proudly proclaims it a true story. To her, fiction would have meant “not true” and perhaps even have connotations of immorality. From a twentieth century
scholar's perspective, however, fiction does not mean false and the truth is always constructed.

For the next part of the story, Adrietta shifts into the first person, taking on the persona of her elderly mother recollecting her childhood:

I was eleven years old, and my name was Mary Ellen Todd. It is Scotch, and you know the wife of Abraham Lincoln was a Todd. She was first cousin to my father; my second cousin.

But first I must tell you how we happened to leave Indiana to go to Arkansas. I guess you never had an ague chill, did you? Well, we did in Indiana and that was why my father, Abbott L. Todd, moved his family to Arkansas. It's this way: first our bones would begin to ache and ache; then we would get colder and colder, and feel weak and weaker, until we finally had to go to bed where we would shake and shake until our teeth would chatter and even the slats on our bed would rattle and clatter. My, but we would feel awful! . . . We took so much bitter quinine that the taste was in our mouths most of the time (Hixon 5).

The shift into first person signals a "replaying" of the story, which Mary Hufford summarizes as Goffman's word for "those tales or anecdotes into which listeners can empathetically insert themselves" and this is distinguished from "reports", which "simply orient us toward a mutually agreed-upon realm without conjuring it" (Hufford 532). This replaying creates two worlds--the narrated event in which the audience is absorbed, and the narrative event, in which the participants can reflect upon the narrated event and "its implications for the
narrative event and beyond” (Hufford summarizing Katharine Young 532). An integral part of the story is an introduction into a different world—an orientation that lets the reader know what she needs to know about the teller and the culture in which she lived. Recounting the Todd family heritage displays pride in her background, tying her to her ancestral Scotland, but replacing that tie with a more important American one—she is remotely related to Abraham Lincoln. Establishing this heritage is part of a coded message—that her “kind” are the rightful owners of the land in America, and she is passing that message along to her grandchildren and to subsequent readers who may be part of a generation that needs to know and appreciate that they are reaping the benefits from others’ hardships. This seems to be part of the lesson she is imparting. She calls attention to the narrative event when she speaks to “you” and when she evaluates the illness as being awful as a way of delineating the difference between the world in the story, which was harder, and the world in which she is telling the story, which is “easier.” The world of ague (she describes the symptoms well—it sounds like flu, but can also be associated with malaria) is as foreign to the children in the story as it is foreign to readers. Even the name of the illness is foreign. The two frames in this passage, orientation and evaluation, are guides for interpretation, “enhancing the distinction between events while highlighting their interrelations and orchestrating participation in the narrative event” (Hufford 535). Both these frames give us a window into the culture in which she grew up and communicate that she is proud of her background and proud of her role in contributing to the identity of this country. We also get the message that we should appreciate the pioneers’ suffering,
which could be guilt-inspiring, but instead she downplays any preaching-quality of her message. The lengthy description of the illness and the exaggeration of the bed’s role in the illness create a rather humorous, almost tall-tale-like quality, to her narrative. This also serves to keep the listeners and the readers interested in the story.

Mary Ellen Todd’s story continues with further descriptions of her family and their move to Arkansas. She describes that some of their relatives told them that they did not get sick as much in Arkansas. Mary Ellen was sad to leave Indiana and her uncle and grandmother, for her grandmother had raised her when her mother died. Mary Ellen’s father then married her mother’s sister and they had another child, Louvina, named after Mary Ellen’s mother. Though the message is coded, “Ere long this wife was also called home leaving another little baby girl...”, readers can figure that his wife died in childbirth. Three years later Mr. Todd married another woman, and a little later “another baby girl came to our house and they named her Cynthia” (6). Most of this section seems to be a continuance of orienting the reader to who Mary Ellen Todd is and what some of her early life-experiences were, giving readers a glimpse at what life was like before the life event that wheeled her into a new land and new identity. Telling about her life before is where her narrative starts. It gives her story the conventional “beginning, middle, end” narrative structure. The fact that she is a child at the time of the crossing also sets up another kind of journey and turning point--she will soon leave adolescence and enter young adulthood, which is a key time in identity creation. So she is more willing to accept the move and thus more willing to allow it to shape her Western identity.
Mary Ellen continues her story, describing what her father did for a living and how she enjoyed watching him make the pottery that she says was “in much demand by the housewives” (5). She explains to her audience how he made the handles, attaching them to the rest of the jug with his thumb print. She says, “These thumb prints always reminded me of father; the vessels bearing the mark seemed almost sacred, and with every such vessel that he sold, I felt as if he was almost giving his picture away” (6). The metonymy here demonstrates how closely intertwined Mary Ellen’s father was with his craft, just as telling this story intertwines the art of the narrative with her own life. The complication is of course that Adrietta is the one telling Mary Ellen’s story, but we could assume that Mary Ellen at least made some reference to her father’s craft and how she felt about it. However, Adrietta did not copy down what her mother said word for word, so we can assume that her inclusion of this detail demonstrates her own skill as a writer and her interest in recreating sentimental ties among her family.

The pottery passage also demonstrates the distance between the narrated event and the narrative event. In the world of the 1920’s, household items were being mass-produced--the craft was separated from the single artisan. Metaphorically, this disconnection could also describe the disconnection among and within individuals, concepts which describe Modernism. Including this description of pottery-making intimates that she feels skills from “the old days” were being lost, types of skills that served pioneer families. It also begins the romance with those old, bygone days.
Aside from the romance, this chapter of Adrietta's tale invites the reader to uncover a culture in which people often moved because of illness, euphemisms for childbirth and death in childbirth were proper in speaking and writing, and family transportation included a yoke of oxen and a sturdy wagon. She closes the chapter with the description of Mary Ellen's father getting the fever--only he was not sick. He had Oregon fever and had made up his mind to go. Her description of the land convinces her audience of why they went: “640 acres of the very best soil in the world--the wonderful timber, water, and a balmy, mild climate that could not be surpassed” (7). To families struggling through cold winters and hot summers and tilling clay soil, this truly sounded like the promised land. My reference to the Bible here is no coincidence, for as Adrietta continues with her mother's narrative, we see that her belief in God is strong. Even some of her chapter titles--Lost in the Wilderness, Elijah Came, A Vision Of An Open Valley, So He Bringeth Them To Their Desired Haven--indicate an allegorical frame by which she interpreted the experiences and by which the audience is to interpret the experiences.

These allusions to Biblical stories and figures are present throughout a number of diaries as well as recollections. Adrietta's refer specifically to Moses and the people of Israel wandering in the wilderness from Egypt to the land of Canaan (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). The title of Chapter XII is “A Vision of an Open Valley.” The vision of the valley refers to God showing Moses the promised land from the top of Mt. Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1-4) after the Israelites wandered for forty years. By the time Mary Ellen's family has reached The Dalles, a stretch of the Columbia River that is swift and dangerous,
they are practically to their “promised land.” By 1852, pioneers had a choice as to whether they would raft down the Columbia River, or take the Barlow Route through the Cascade Mountains. This route included passages that were so steep that pioneers tied felled trees to the backs of their wagons to create a drag on the wagons. The Todds chose also to hitch a chain to the wagon and around a standing tree at the top and ease themselves down (43). When they are just about over the mountains, Mary Ellen states: “we began to see, through the timber on ahead a vision of an open valley. Peering out, I saw that it was sprinkled with spreading oaks, while it seemed to be surrounded by a fringe of evergreens reaching up onto those mountains, and on into the blue sky above. I thought, ‘Yes, this is the Oregon I have been hoping to get to’” (44).

Within that same chapter, she offers the audience the source of her reference to her thirteenth and final chapter, “So He Bringeth Them To Their Desired Haven.” When the Todds finally stopped near Salem after six months of long hard travel, Mary Ellen’s father read them the 107th Psalm. She summarizes its message: “We noted how the Lord had gathered His redeemed out of the wilderness, and delivered the hungry and thirsty who cried unto Him. We also noted how he had helped them over the deep waters, and then when we came to the latter part of the 30th verse, which reads, ‘So he bringeth them unto their desired Haven,’ we all felt that the Psalmist must have had us in mind when he wrote all this” (44). The “desired Haven” in the last chapter is Mary Ellen’s description of forty acres of land and a cabin her father rented. Soon her father had planted a crop and her mother was busy setting up the house.
Continuing with her Biblical references, her story appropriately ends with a description of their first Christmas, symbolically a time of rebirth for the Todd family in this new and strange country. Being immersed in the Christian worldview, Mary Ellen and Adrietta construct their story as a symbolic representation of Moses' and Jesus' travels and travails, and in the end their persistence pays off. However, both Jesus and Moses had to die to reach paradise, whereas Elijah (the Biblical prophet but also the name of Mary Ellen's brother born on the trails) did not have to die. Just as the Todd family made it to the "promised land" in their covered wagon, Elijah was taken straight to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2: 11). The Biblical journey is an archetypal one for the narrator and audience--the stories they knew informed those they created. Catherine Rainwater sums up this phenomenon of narrativity simply: "the world takes on the shape of the stories we tell" (583). Using the Biblical paradigm was one way that Adrietta and Mary Ellen could relate to and interpret their experience with this strange and unknown terrain.

The Christmas celebration at the end not only roots them religiously to the land, but also socially and culturally. Mary Ellen describes decorating that is familiar and traditional to any audience who has access to the Christmas celebration: "Louvina and I made several trips to the woods for ferns, evergreens, and vines. Great was our joy in deck ing out our walls, shelves, and the table with festoons, garlands, and jars of green and autumn colorings... Soon after mid-day, we all bowed our heads about a well spread table. There was roasted beef and gravy, mashed potatoes, cabbage slaw, butter and old-fashioned pone bread baked in our dutch oven. Mother had made some
pumpkin butter that added a spicy flavor. With all this and mother's sweet-cake, and some stick candy John brought, we were amply satisfied, and all was as merry as Christmas should be" (46-47). This idealized Christmas celebration continues with the children playing outside, doing their chores, lightheartedly teasing each other, telling jokes and riddles while roasting hazelnuts and popping corn, and in the evening sitting around the fire while their father reads the story of Christ's birth. With the idealization of Christmas comes the distance between the narrated event and the narrative event. Mary Ellen talks about how Christmas "should be" and how, when it comes to presents, "Sometimes a few little gifts were exchanged, but we never thought of receiving so many things as you children do. But we were just as happy then as you are now. You know it is not things that make people happy, but love and honest toil" (46-47). Even some words she chooses--"decking" the walls and "old-fashioned" pone bread--conjure up an idealized Christmas of days gone by. Creating a perfect Christmas celebration communicates in the narrative event the idea that the narrator feels that materialism and Godlessness are more common in the modern society than they used to be, and that they are both destructive forces because they lose sight of family and tradition and love. In general, narrating life experiences is the action by which the narrator creates coherence and meaning in her life and which communicates that meaning to an audience. In this story, Adrietta Applegate Hixon is ultimately trying to communicate the goodness of her mother's character and upbringing, and is trying to impart concepts of "good living" upon the generations to follow.
Adrietta Applegate Hixon's narrative is an example of a published reminiscence. The writer was aware that she would have a reading audience, and the publisher, even a small-town publisher, felt that the story was interesting enough to collect a readership. A number of women followed this path. Sarah J. Cummins wrote a booklet entitled *Autobiography and Reminiscences* in 1914 that was compiled from her notes and reminiscences and published. Copies were sold at fifty cents apiece. At the request of her son, Sarah Royce wrote a book about her journey and settlement that was published in 1932 by Yale University Press under the title *Frontier Lady*. These published reminiscences share commonalities with life history, autobiography or memoir--the recollections not only tell of the journey but of the identity of the journey-maker. Mark Freeman states that "the history one tells, via memory, assumes the form of a narrative of the past that charts the trajectory of how one's self came to be" (33). As demonstrated, the journey was the turning point in the lives of these women. Their pioneer experiences remained a strong part of their identities and connected them with others in a kind of collective identity. Even in the twentieth century we see over and over again that to survive and overcome trying times (such as the Depression or World War II) unites people and the hardship creates an identifying and identity-making point of communication among the people who lived through it. Memories for those who lived through these times became about how the nation pulled together and neighbors helped neighbors. Writing about the Western migration, Sarah Royce gives a sense of how people pulled together and helped each other out even after they all arrived in California. She and her family were staying in a
tent when a tremendous rain storm came and began flooding the area. They decide to appeal to a Dr. M------, who had recently built a house on high ground, to rent a room. By the end of the evening, the Dr. had consented to letting fifty people stay in the small house. Provisions were rescued by some settlers and there was enough to share with everyone who was stranded (92-95). That kind of benevolence was expected among the settlers, the “good people” (Royce 109). However, Sarah Royce notes in disgust some who took advantage of some people’s distress:

...a boatman refused to take on board a man who was clinging to the ridge of a small tent, almost submerged, until the latter should pay twenty dollars; which he declared he could not do, having lost all his money. The brutal fellow was about to row off, leaving the nearly drowned man to perish, when a heavily laden ship’s boat came up. The captain divined the difficulty at once, and under cover of a pistol compelled the first boatman to take aboard the suffering man, and row along-side the larger boat to a place of safety; assuring him that if he attempted to disobey orders he should be shot instantly. Such cases showed that there were about us desperately selfish men, who would stop at nothing for the sake of gain; but I am glad to say we heard of few such things; while instances of generous aid, and ready sympathy were common (96).

As she states, though she hears stories of malevolence, instances of members of the emigrant community helping each other were far more prevalent.
Upon arrival in California, the Royce's took up shelter in a number of places, including some rough mining camps. In her narrative, we get a sense of who she was from her commentary on all the different people she met. She was a person interested in keeping up high moral and religious standards, and this is apparent in two of her chapter titles: "Morals" and "Fortitude." To Mrs. Royce, the frontier was a tester of the moral codes that characterized civilized life in the East. She describes most of the people she came in contact with as "the most respectable and companionable people in San Francisco" (108).

Sarah Royce, like Adrietta Applegate Hixon, ascribes her family's safe journey and life's meaning to the power of God. She describes life in a small village after leaving San Francisco:

As I look back to the months I spent there, it always seems to me that there was then granted me an extra installment of youth; so unexpectedly rich and fresh were the experiences that came to me during that time. Not that I was rich in worldly goods, nor in surroundings that are ordinarily supposed to make life happy. But there are spiritual treasures; experiences of heart and mind, the joy of having done good to some struggling soul, the gladness of witnessing and sharing victory over evil, the certainty of a Guiding Presence, always near; these things bring delight to the spirit which never comes from mere outward prosperity (126).

Like in Adrietta Hixon's mother's narration of the Christmas celebration, Sarah Royce maintains that one need not have material things to be happy. And like Adrietta, she sees the West allegorically. But rather than seeing her journey as

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the Biblical journeys to the promised land, she views her experiences with the West as the force of Good overcoming the force of Evil. As the editor of her reminiscence notes, “The frontier, to the [nineteenth-century] Puritan, was the stage for an elemental struggle between good and evil” (108). In her chapter “Morals”, Sarah describes how the crowds of emigrants, “many from the worst classes, bent upon getting gold at all hazards,” were motivated by the evils of greed. She also describes the emigrants who intended “to get it honestly, by labor or legitimate business” (109). But she notes, “as they came to feel the force of unwonted excitement and the pressure of unexpected temptation, they too often yielded, little by little, till they found themselves standing upon a very low plane, side by side with those whose society they once would have avoided” (109). She goes on to describe reckless behavior—men buying land for cattle ranges on credit only to have the returns so long in coming that the interest put them out of business, men buying beef cattle only to discover that the cost of feeding and keeping them was too high (113). She also notes “some of the unfavorable effects of the great California emigration movement upon American domestic life” (116): single men “insinuating themselves into the affections of married women,” and women who sought divorce from their husbands (117-118). Though she has numerous “dark pictures” of the corruption, she remains optimistic because “just beside them, within the walls of neighboring dwellings, sometimes under the same roof might have been drawn pictures, as true, of social circles in which refinement, morality and religion were as fondly cherished, and as faithfully illustrated in domestic life, as in the homes on the Atlantic shore” (109).
Sarah Royce presents a self defined by high morals, civilized society, and religion. Her daughter-in-law perhaps sums the character she is communicating to her son and to her larger audience the best:

It has always seemed to me that the unfailing energy and cheerfulness with which Mrs. Royce met all hardships and rude conditions of living were especially fine in her because she dearly prized the benefits of civilization, not the gaieties or luxuries, but the churches, the libraries, the schools, and the companionship of an enlightened society. She was indeed giving up much. . .no matter what the surroundings, this brave and persevering woman never roughened nor allowed her children to roughen. In a Sierra Nevada mining camp town she managed to give her four children. . .an excellent early training, having for them astronomical charts, histories, and an encyclopedia of common and scientific knowledge and other instructive books. . .Both she and her husband were of English parentage and born in England, but were brought to America in childhood. . .She was brought up in New York State, and had a careful, old-style academy education, supplemented throughout her life by much reading and study. . .It was very characteristic of Mrs. Royce that when bidden at a time of danger to abandon almost all her possessions, she rescued and brought through to California her Bible, her Milton, and a tiny lap writing desk (iii-v).
Obviously, to Sarah as well as to her daughter-in-law, maintaining civilized, educated manners and society in a rough-and-tumble West was the highest of virtues as well as the only identity appropriate to maintain. She also has a strong sense of community, which is an important aspect in the maintenance of identity for her in her older years. Passing along her story to not only her son but to unknown readers helps her to pass along some of the traditions and values of the West that are important to her.

Among the unpublished reminiscences, I found one written by Lydia Milner Waters twenty-two years after the journey for her son who was five at the time of crossing. She opens her account with a note to her son: “My dear Cochran, I wish you would keep this account of our crossing the plains until the year 1900. It will then be amusing to read of things many years past and forgotten. In these dull times it has taken me back to some pleasant scenes. You will always remember riding the black horses” (Waters 59). Her sons allowed The Society of California Pioneers to place her account in their archives; the Society published it in 1929 in their periodical. She did not originally write it to be published as did the other women in this chapter. The account functions as a family and community history intended to be read and kept by family. It also articulates her identity as the family historian and her eagerness to communicate that family history to other generations (Culley 4). Having arrived in California, she and her husband were involved in farming, mining, and toll-road building and operating. Apparently, from the note to her son, these activities were nothing compared to the excitement of traveling the trails. Her plea to have him keep the account until 1900 is a plea to remember
and pass the history along to the next generation; she will presumably be dead by 1900 since she was sixty-eight when she wrote the account in 1877. She seems to be aware of a broader reading audience because even though the account is for her son, she uses his name in the third person. Though her narrative is not performed in the way that Adrietta Applegate Hixon's is, her narrative still posits and communicates her identity to a reading audience. Her narrative is rhetorically structured as a “report”, with a diachronic movement parallel to the westward journey, but also synchronic, episodic descriptions of different events on the trail. The reporting makes her recollection less exciting because her audience is not drawn into the narrated event; they are only participants in the narrative event. The moments when Lydia breaks out of the narrated event into the narrative one through keys to performance (Bauman, *Verbal Art*) and also strategies of coding (Radner, *Feminist Messages*) are where we get clues to her identity and to what she is communicating about that identity.

One of her main purposes in telling this journey seems to be to communicate many of the humorous events of the journey--events she could make into “good” stories. Had her wagon train come upon many misfortunes and tragedies along the way, she would have framed her narrative to communicate the sacrifices and hardships of the journey. The alternative would be for it to founder hopelessly in trivial and repetitive expressions. An evaluation (Bauman and Labov), which comes at the end of her account, reveals her attitude toward recounting the journey and directs the audience response to her narrative: “Many a laughable incident comes to my mind which
would make this account too lengthy" (78). This evaluation serves as a commentary on convention and her competence. She does not want her account to be too long—that might put her into a category other than family historian and apparently she does not feel competent with another role. As a twentieth century reader, I would have been quite interested in the funny stories—we hear so much in general of the hardships (the Donner party, the Whitman massacre)—that it would be an interesting dimension of the journey to know about. Later in her story we see that she is quite competent in a number of roles.

Her view of laughable incidents comes in the form of discovering rifts in what others claim about themselves, and how they really act. The perpetrators of this kind of rift are generally young men indulging in braggadocio and bravado, who end up as fools and cowards. Her first example comes early in her account:

Isaac George, one of George's [her husband's] men, ornamented himself with gun, pistol and bowie knife, and strutted about the town [Keisters, Iowa]. That night we camped a couple of miles beyond the town, and in the morning the Constable arrived and arrested Isaac for debt. It seemed he had been to the Seminary there to study for the ministry, and had not paid his way. As drivers were scarce George had to pay it, though he never got a cent for his trouble (60).

The humor in this story is twofold. Not only is it a story of a young man, bragging about his prowess with his outer dress and getting arrested, but the
fact that he was studying for the ministry and got into debt is an ironic twist. He
got his just rewards for being so ostentatious, but ultimately the message is that
that kind of behavior costs the immigrants money, time, comfort, and safety.

Lydia follows this incident with another that paints Isaac differently from
how he painted himself in the previous episode:

Some days afterward we forded the Wapsipinicon, the worst ford
on our trip. It was a wide stream with steep banks and a deep
channel on each shore. Isaac was terribly afraid of the water, but
he went into the stream before our wagon. When the wagon
dipped into the water he jumped up on the back of it, and standing
with one foot on each corner of the wagon box, his arms spread on
each side of the bows, he looked just like a spread eagle. But the
oxen stopped and with all his shouting would not move, so he
finally had to get off his roost and into the water up to his armpits to
drive them. This was in the early afternoon, and about two o'clock
a heavy thunderstorm came up and poured until eleven that night.
I had to wring out our blankets for they got soaking wet at the ford,
and we made our beds and soaked in them all night (60).

Lydia uses words and images that paint him as a helpless coward: afraid of
water, spread eagle, roost. At the end of this passage she uses understatement
and hedging (Radner 19) to communicate that inept Isaac is the one
responsible for the wet blankets, not the storm. Her descriptions of Isaac earlier
in the passage serve as her retaliation for the discomfort he put them in.
She continues her string of narratives with yet another incident in which young men brag but do not live up to their bragging. She sets up this incident with sarcasm which does not communicate its full meaning until two paragraphs later:

In a few days we fell in with a party of young men with five hundred head of cattle and a few horses. One of them, Mr. Neal, was a very nice person. He was the owner and had driven the cattle all the way across Wisconsin. He and his men were not afraid of the Indians, and would not be turned back by them. Not they!

[She goes on to describe a horse stampede. The horses made their way forty two miles back to a town called Winterset, but Mr. Neal’s men recovered them. ]

A few days after this, hoping to catch a train we wished to travel with, George and I started for Kanesville, leaving the wagons to follow. But we missed that company by a few hours, and had to camp a short distance from the town on the banks of the Missouri River, to wait for a train to gather, for only a strong party could safely face the Sioux Indians, who were then at war with the States. Poor Neal and his men became frightened, and backed out, and he took a contract for plowing in the neighborhood. All his stock was stolen and the next year he came to Marysville, California. I should say we had some mighty men of valor with us. The Indians would die of fright as soon as they saw them! These
mighty men could fire forty shots out of their wagons without
reloading (61).

He got his just desserts too, for being cowardly after much bragging of how
brave they were. Lydia uses the luxury of hindsight that recollections allow to
introduce characters not in line with her practicality and then show the rewards
they get for being fools or show-offs. She does this with women as well as men,
and she has particular contempt for a wealthy section of their train:

Ten wagons had horses only, which made their owners our
“aristocracy.” They would not conform to the rules, would not stand
guard, and made themselves very disagreeable. The ladies
dressed in merinos, white collars, chains, rings, and brooches.
They had their crockery ware instead of tin, and late into the night
they danced and sang and fiddled, so hardly anyone could sleep
for the noise they made. Soon they found it too slow to travel in a
train with oxen, and left us, expecting to gallop into California (62).

Having horses draw wagons instead of oxen was much faster and was also a
sign of wealth. But Lydia narrates their “reward” for being contemptuous--the
horse train was robbed by the Indians of sixteen horses and they almost
kidnapped an eighteen year old girl. However, later, they come across the train
“laying over” in order for a child to die of whooping cough. This was a sad
occurrence, and Lydia consoles them, portraying her thoughtfulness to her
audience--she is the “hero” of the story.

Horse and mule wagons and the classism that came with riding in one
was common. The members thought they could get to Oregon or California
quicker and they thought they were better than everyone else. Adrietta Applegate Hixon also speaks of a mule train and the fate that befell them:

There was an emigrant train that had been passing and repassing us for some time that was causing considerable comment. They had mule teams and the words “Sure and Swift” painted on their wagon sheets. These emigrants were all dressed up in style and they would sail by us, looking contempt at our slow going oxen. Then they would lay over for some time and we would again pass them. They often had music and seemed to be having wonderful times. People said they used silverware and white table linen and everything to correspond. Again and again they sailed by us, thus creating a great sensation among us. Had we but known what was to be their fate, we would have felt only pity for them (Hixon 24).

This description is similar to Lydia’s. The mule train appears again after Mary Ellen and her family were safe in a cabin in Oregon. The mule train had been stranded in the mountains after some mules were stolen and no help was available. “Thus the intense cold of winter came upon them when they were unprepared to meet it . . . Those who were the few survivors told a harrowing tale of starvation and suffering. They had to subsist on their remaining mules, finally even gnawing on their harness. Those who were still living were in such a pitiable condition when found that it was hard to restore them. The rescuers said that in contrast to all this, the frayed old wagon covers still bore the painted words ‘Sure and Swift’” (Hixon 46). The irony in this tragedy could be
explained by Adrietta’s belief in spiritual things over material, and her belief that love and honest toil make people happy. The conspicuous wealth this mule train had and their contempt of others was ultimately their downfall in Adrietta’s Christian worldview. In Lydia’s narrative, the downfall for the horse train can be explained from her pragmatic world view—if you are foolish you eventually pay for that foolishness.

Lydia sets up another case of foolishness that does not have its full meaning until the end of her account. It starts off as a sad story. A young gentleman named Mr. Myers is found dead in his carriage after a violent thunder storm. Apparently he had gotten into the carriage “to keep the blinds down to prevent the lining from getting wet, and was found sitting on the front seat dead. The lightning had struck the top of his head and run down his neck and side, escaping out of the carriage without leaving a mark” (63). He left a wife and three month old child, and the last scene of this death episode that Lydia leaves us with is that of the wife screaming and clasping the grave in her arms. This is a sad story that was also common on the journey. The story has a twist in the end though. After arriving in California,

A stranger, obviously searching for someone, came into camp. Mrs. Myers saw him and dashed into her tent, but he recognized her, and quite a scene was enacted when he met her with her baby in her arms. It seemed that back in Illinois this stranger had been engaged to her, and that he had come to California to make his fortune. He and Myers became partners in a mining venture and prospered. Then as soon as his finances
warranted he decided to return to the east for his bride.

Somehow, during their discussion of the care of their mine during this absence, it was decided that he and Myers should draw lots to determine which of them should make the eastern trip. Myers won, so he was to bring the girl back and the wedding was to have been held in California. He made the trip, but himself became infatuated with the girl and succeeded in gaining her acceptance. After their baby was born he decided to return to California, and joined the train where he met his fatal ending" (77).

This ending is not so common an occurrence, though Sarah Royce spoke of these kinds of incidents in her reminiscence. Lydia does not come out and say it, but linking Mr. Myers' bizarre death to the end of this short narrative ties in with other stories she tells about people getting what they deserve because of their actions. Unlike Adrietta or Sarah, however, she does not have Christian or highly moral overtones to her account, either in this instance or in the ones previously mentioned.

Probably the strongest message, comes with her descriptions of her ability to do "men's work" on the trails, the incompetence of men on the trails, her ingenuity and thoughtfulness, and her dispensation of some feminine conventions. All of these lead to the message of her strength and power as a woman on the frontier. Lydia takes many opportunities to tell us that she drove oxen. Journeying on the banks of the Platte she writes: "It was a long hard day's drive through deep dust--and hot. I was driving loose stock and got nearly choked" (66). She later notes, "...my driving was admired by an officer and his
wife who were going with mail to Salt Lake City. I heard them laughing at the thought of a woman driving oxen. Maybe" (77).

Early in her narrative, we get a combination of seeing her ability to do men's work and the incompetence of men:

As we were passing Saleratus Lake, one of our men saw an antelope, and took a heavily loaded gun, which was prepared in case of an Indian attack, out of the wagon. He couldn't get near enough to shoot the animal so put the gun back in the bow of the wagon, and left it cocked. I was driving oxen in the wagon at the time, resting from driving loose stock. In moving, the skirt of my dress caught the hammer of the gun. Off it went. Our horses were tied with long ropes behind, and luckily the whole charges raked only one side of the horses. They broke loose and ran away. We were the last of the train, so no one was shot. The wagon cover caught fire and, as usual, our water had been given away. Someone ran to a forward wagon for water. I thought of the leaves in the teapot, and filling my hands with them patted on the fire. The wind was very strong, but I almost had it out when the water came. Had a patchwork quilt over the traps inside, and it was burnt considerably. George got the horses. The one called Sam was well peppered, and the slugs did not work out until five months afterward. My hands were so scorched that they did not get well for two months (67).
This is a prime example of her stories which illustrate her competence and ingenuity and men's and women's incompetence on the trail. She proclaims her ability overtly on August 7th:

. . .we came to the Humboldt natural wells at the head of the Humboldt River. A long way down the Humboldt the train had to stop, for a child was born, a boy. The Indians were troublesome, so one of the men told them that the woman had smallpox, and they left in a hurry. Some of the women were much frightened. The mother of the woman who was confined cried and cried, fearing her daughter would die. Then the others followed suit, and so, as usual when there was trouble, I had to boss the job. We laid over one day, and then moved on. The mother and child did well, could not have done better anywhere else (73).

She not only claims her competence and bravery, but she sets it in sharp contrast to other women. She sets herself apart from worrying women, but aligns herself with them when they can do something besides wring their hands: "Five of them [buffalo] came near where we were laying over one afternoon and would have run over the tents had the women not shaken their aprons and sun bonnets, and shouted at them, which made them turn to avoid us" (64). But she still proclaims her competence and thoughtfulness over all the other people, men and women, in her train. When Mr. Myers died, she discloses, "I kept a lock of his hair which was burnt off by the lightning and gave it to his wife some days afterward. No one else had thought of cutting it for her" (64).

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She finishes the body of her narrative with a vivid image of her doing something that did not fit with feminine convention:

I climbed up one [a mountain peak], tore off my petticoat and put it on a long cane and piled stones about it. Later, many miles away we could still see my flag. It is likely I was the first white woman who had ever been on that peak (77).

This is a testament to her feminine power. She is taking on the character of the (male) explorer planting the flag of the mother country on newly discovered soil. Except she is proclaiming her discovery with the flag of the mother--her petticoat is a metonymic device which plants female power squarely in California; the women helped to create families and civilized towns.

Her narrative closes with a kind of coda, recapitulating the fact that the journey took six months and reinforcing her communication to readers that her main concern with writing this was to recollect the humorous incidents: “. . .George and I would laugh heartily. There were many things to laugh about” (79).

These women who wrote reminiscences felt a strong need to preserve the story of their journey for future generations. They knew, on a grand scale, they had taken part in an important part of United States history, but on a smaller scale that they had taken part in bettering their and their families lives. They had led honest and hardworking lives and had maintained the values of education and propriety that they brought with them from the East that had helped them survive and flourish in the West. Telling these stories anchored
their pioneer identities in a rapidly modernizing world, and passed along to the next generation their pioneer values.
The categories that I divided women’s diaries into hinge on concerns of the compelling nature of the story they wanted to tell, different choices about how to tell it, and the implications of the construction of themselves and the frontier. These concerns are based on the degree to which the writer is aware of herself as author and of a reading audience. In the chronicle diaries, such as Susan Marsh Cranston’s, the writer presents descriptive detail without making a story, she does not seem to be aware of a reading audience, and she presents a self that is obscured. It is hard to tell exactly how she is negotiating her Eastern identity with the Western frontier because she rarely reveals her emotional responses to the travel conditions. In the literary self-conscious journals, such as Mary Warner’s, almost every entry has descriptive detail as well as a story of an incident that happened that day. She is aware of a reading audience and addresses them directly, and her Eastern identity on the frontier is explicit throughout her journal. Finally, in the reminiscences, such as Adrietta Applegate Hixon’s, the writer has time and distance to construct a compelling story of the journey, she is aware that she is writing explicitly for an audience and is counting on the audience to agree with her idea of a good story, and her
frontier identity is communicated to her audience. She has already negotiated her Eastern and Western identities and has found feminine power and moral peace in the struggle.

The idea that the women had and readers have of a romanticized West is what informs the construction of these journals and reminiscences by the writer and the evaluation by the reader. That kind of construction and evaluation is dependent on the notion of a frontier—is it a compelling story of the frontier? Is it the kind of story the reader expects based on his or her idea of what a frontier story is? Lavinia Porter concisely describes the ideal frontier storytelling event in terms of the responses of the tellers (Westerners) and the audience (her emigrant party), who met up along the trail:

We encouraged them to tell of the remarkable episodes of their venturesome lives, and it seemed to give them as much pleasure to relate as it did us to sit alternately thrilled or trembling at the wonderful stories. None of the many tales we had read of Western adventure could have so moved us, not even the famous Fennimore [sic] Cooper over whose stories we had burned the midnight oil (Allen 53).

The tellers constructed stories about the frontier that the audience wanted to hear, and both parties’ expectations were fulfilled. Their expectations were met to such an extent that they considered the “real life” stories better than the fictional. The fiction, in this case, is evidently the story of the frontier that influenced some of their ideas of the frontier. Adrietta Applegate Hixon also sets up the perfect storytelling situation in which her sons ask their grandmother
to tell her story of crossing the plains. They expect an adventure story of the
now-extinct frontier, and their grandmother constructs a narrative to fulfill their
expectations. In doing so, she creates and maintains a nostalgia for a frontier
that only exists in stories, legends, and images.

All of these images follow a white, European master plot of the frontier—it
is something to be tamed and the tamers are considered victors. In fact, the
victors wrote the histories. Thus, for the receivers of this western pioneer
heritage and privilege—Euro-Americans—it is easy to have nothing but pride,
admiration and longing for frontier days and frontier people. The frontier is an
American folk idea that has influenced the way we see ourselves and the world,
and the way the world sees us. It is a time that is recreated in pioneer festivals,
in our fascination with “old ways,” in “authentic” nineteenth-century towns such
as Ohio Village (Columbus, Ohio) or Roscoe Village (Coshocton, Ohio), and in
Frontierlands at our amusement parks. The idea of the frontier—its promise, its
adventure, its untainted nature—is so entrenched in our culture that new places
of exploration, such as space (“the final frontier”) and now even cyberspace, are
cast in terms of frontier. It is part of the American cultural identity to have a
frontier to explore. The paradox is that the frontier narratives both men and
women constructed in the time period covered by this dissertation are also
narratives of destruction—of the resources as well as the native peoples who
relied on those resources; thus it is also part of the American cultural identity to
have a frontier to conquer (or destroy).

The beginning of the end of the frontier in the West commenced after
1868, when emigration by wagon dropped off because of rail travel that
extended from coast to coast. Settlers began to look to the middle regions of the US rather than the coasts (Schlissel, Women's Diaries 144). The western trails became full of trading posts, so travel was no longer a solitary experience with nothing but endless prairies to look at. Telegraph poles were strung the entire route by 1861, and Salt Lake City had become a well-established community (Schlissel, Women's Diaries 118). Consequently, the frontier as many diarists experienced it was rapidly disappearing, becoming romanticized; but as many diarists found, the West was always already romanticized by fiction, guidebooks, newspaper articles, and word-of-mouth.

This romance with the frontier was formally valorized in Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," documented from a publication from the 1890 Census Bureau stating there was no longer a need to report on the "frontier of settlement" because it no longer existed. Turner felt that this marked the end of a great movement in history, "the history of the colonization of the Great West." He maintained that colonizing the West explained the free-spiritedness, nationalism, democratic zeal, and ingenuity that went into the character of The American (Introduction). Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, had advised "Go west, young man, and grow up with the country" (National Park Service 28), which articulated the beginning of a mythic journey, the hero of which was a young man. Both of these theses were distinctly directed to and motivated by a masculine view of the world, one which included seeing the wilderness as a "virgin paradise" and something to be conquered (Kolodny The Land Before Her 3). From the beginning of travels to the New World, males projected their sexual desires onto
the geography. According to them, the land received them openly and happily (Kolodny, *The Land Before Her* 4). Men's accounts of the overland trails often put the landscape in terms of the kinds of crops that could be grown—in other words, how much the landscape would yield to them and how they could make a living off of it.

In women's journals and especially reminiscences, women too constructed a narrative of the overland trails in terms of a mythic journey. They departed from home, met with difficult obstacles to overcome, and they arrived in a civilized place with an identity somewhat altered by their experiences. However, they did not see themselves as individual heroes, but as members of a community who faced the hardships of the journey together. Their main concern was keeping their families alive so they could be together in the new land. Along with the men, the women imposed a metaphor on the landscape, but theirs was of a garden rather than a virgin paradise. (References to the landscape as garden are discussed in Chapter 3.) According to Annette Kolodny, “women's public and private documents alike began to claim the new terrain as their own. Even as husbands and fathers looked with suspicious eye upon the treeless prairies and clung, when they could, to the edges of the woods. The prairie, however, spoke to women's fantasies. And there, with an assurance she had not previously commanded, the newly self-conscious American Eve proclaimed a paradise in which the garden and the home were one” (6). Thus, while men looked to the landscape in terms of making a living, women looked at it in terms of making a home and a community. Most of the diarists in this study record their responses to the beautiful and romantic
landscape at least once in their writings, and a few even talk about it in terms of whether or not they could live there, imagining homes and gardens on the untouched landscape. So a “good narrative” of the frontier includes reporting spectacular landscapes as well as imposing an Eastern lifestyle on it.

These narratives of the frontier shaped a cultural identity that began with the concept of Manifest Destiny—a divine right to the land. Biblical references in Adrietta Applegate Hixon’s narrative as well as Mrs. Frances Sawyer’s indicate how deeply the settlers identified themselves as the “chosen people” on the road to “the promised land.” The frontier period in America consisted of journeying on a safe road with a relatively dangerous area surrounding it. In that dangerous area were wilderness and Indians, and these were obstacles to Manifest Destiny. Pioneer goals were to make the road wider and safer at the expense of everything not of their culture, and romanticizing the landscape and dehumanizing the indigenous cultures were the underlayment for the wider road.

In most diaries and reminiscences of the journey, Indians were cast in roles that were sub-human, so the white settlers could see their own dominance as moral and justified. So another aspect of a “good frontier story” is to report stories of the Indian’s lack of intelligence or extreme brutalities. Until recently, historical accounts of American national expansion, following Turner’s lead, told a story of the West being created in isolation (Gitlin 71). Now historians are exploring and recognizing the “connectedness” between settling the West and its place in a larger story of European colonialism (Gitlin 2). Even though the West evoked in settlers the sense of freedom and opportunity, they brought with
them all the trappings of society in the East and disrupted an indigenous culture (Gitlin 2). Historians William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin have worked to recast Turner's romanticized process of "taming" the frontier into a region. This rewriting takes into account the destructive forces, such as disease and land-taking, that went along with the constructive forces (11, 14). Unfortunately for the native people, this kind of self-reflexivity on the part of whites has come far too late. So, while the diaries, letters, and reminiscences of both men and women on the overland trail tell a collective white story of "how the West was won," the destruction of land resources and tribes tell, from a Native American perspective, "how the West was lost."

While the ultimate destruction of the Native American way of life is a sad and irreparable consequence of western migration, the impetus to emigrate and the documents left behind are compelling. The forces influencing the diary-writing--romantic literature, identity negotiation--make these documents complex and powerful inscriptions of women on the overland trail. The diaries and reminiscences provide a glimpse into how women responded to the journey, and the construction of identity provides for readers a sense of the personality of an individual woman so she cannot be erased from history.
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