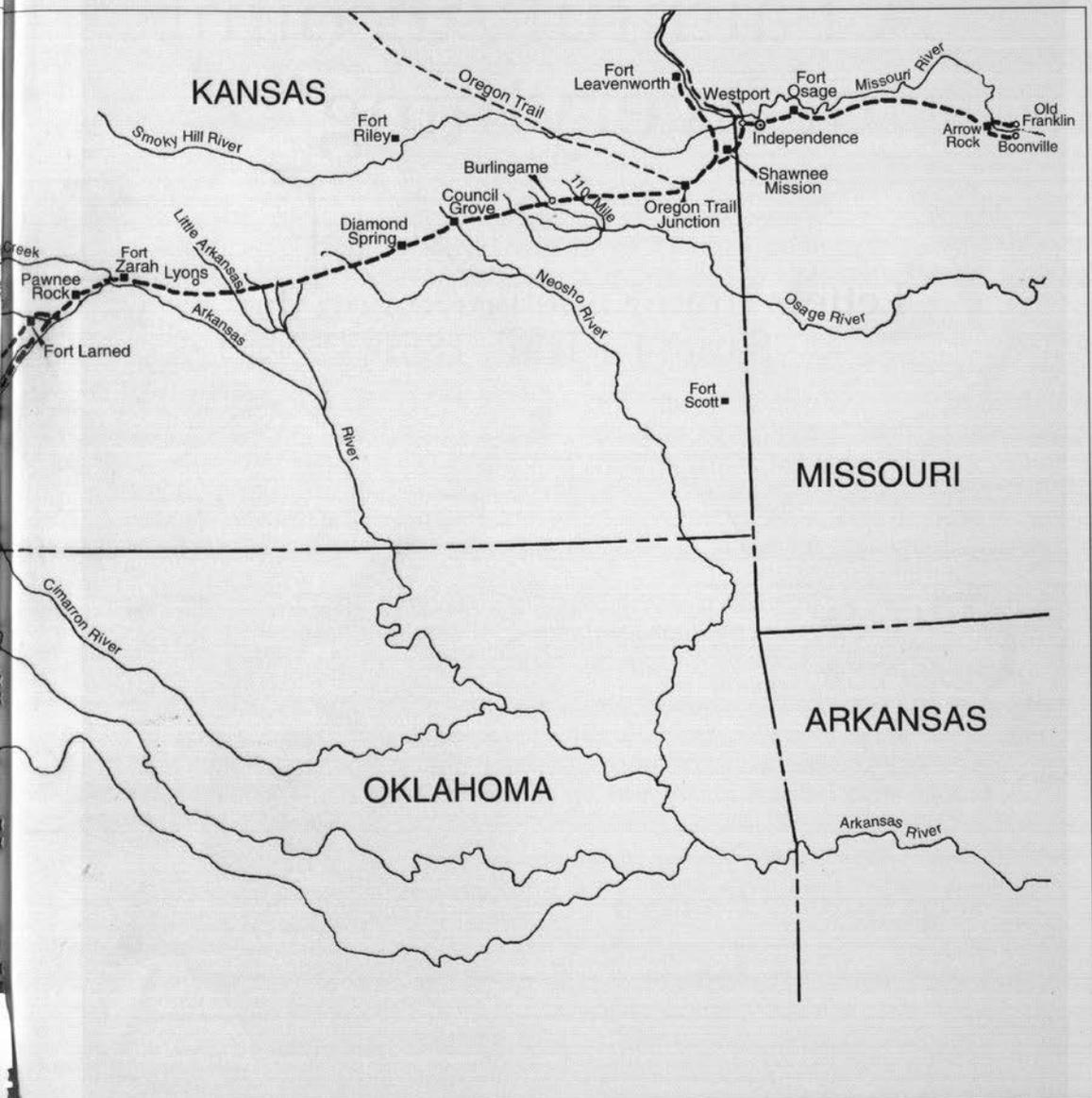


# MAP OF THE



# SANTA FE TRAIL



# "A Faithful Account of Everything"

## Letters from Katie Bowen on the Santa Fe Trail, 1851

edited by Leo E. Oliva

**C**atherine Cary Bowen (known to family and friends as Katie) traveled the Santa Fe Trail in 1851 from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to newly established Fort Union, New Mexico, with her army officer husband, Captain Isaac Bowen. Katie wrote to her family in Maine during that trip and the succeeding four years that she and Isaac lived in New Mexico. These letters, plus others written by Katie and Isaac from 1845 to 1858, constitute one of the finest pre-Civil War collections of correspondence about military life available today.<sup>1</sup>

Katie Bowen traveled the Santa Fe Trail five years after Susan Shelby Magoffin, whose 1846 diary is the earliest known account of travel over the route by a woman.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Bowen's letters

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Leo E. Oliva, Woodston, Kansas, is a historian of the frontier army and the Santa Fe Trail and is the author of a dozen books including *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail and Fort Union* and *the Frontier Army in the Southwest*. He is editor of *Wagon Tracks: Santa Fe Trail Association Quarterly*.

1. The approximately seven hundred letters of Katie and Isaac Bowen, 1845–1858, were recently placed in the Bowen Family Papers, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, hereafter referred to as Bowen Family Papers. Letters from the collection used in this article are identified by date and to whom addressed. Special thanks are extended to the late Gwladys Bowen and the United States Army Military History Institute Archives for making the Bowen correspondence available.

2. Susan Shelby Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846–1847*, ed. Stella M. Drumm (1926; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). So far as is known, the first Anglo American woman to travel the Santa Fe Trail was Mary Donoho in 1833. See Marian Meyer, *Mary Donoho: New First Lady of the Santa Fe Trail* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1991).



*Isaac and Katie Bowen, ca. 1850*

place her in the rank of other well-known women who traveled in the West or were officers' wives on the frontier, including such famous names as Magoffin, Marion Sloan Russell, Elizabeth Bacon Custer, Martha Summerhayes, Lydia Spencer Lane, Eveline Alexander, Alice Baldwin, Frances Boyd, and Julia Archibald Holmes. Katie Bowen was literate, observant, curious, compassionate, lucid, somewhat philosophical, and had a fine sense of humor. Her letters are informative, affectionate, and delightful to read. The following selections from her letters during the trip to New Mexico are a sample of the larger collection.<sup>3</sup>

Catherine Cary grew up in a family of several children in Houlton, Maine, near the Canadian border. She apparently was well educated, but little is known about her early years. Isaac Bowen was a native of Buffalo, New York, and he was appointed to the U.S. Military Academy in 1838 and graduated in 1842, fifteenth in a class of fifty-six. His classmates included William S. Rosecrans, Abner Doubleday, James Longstreet, James W. Abert, John Pope, and George Sykes.<sup>4</sup>

After graduation Lieutenant Bowen was assigned to the artillery and served at Fort Kent, Maine, until 1843, and at Hancock Barracks at Houlton, Maine, 1843-1845. There he met and courted Catherine Cary; they were married on March 25, 1845. She accompanied him on recruiting duty and then to his regiment in Florida. During the Mexican War, while he was engaged in several battles, she lived with her parents in Maine, and he wrote to her (an excellent collection of Mexican War material). He received the

brevet rank of captain for gallantry and meritorious conduct in the Battle of Buena Vista, Mexico. After the war he was stationed at an arsenal in Pennsylvania, and in 1850 he was promoted to captain in the Commissary of Subsistence Department.

When Colonel Edwin V. Sumner was assigned to take command of the Ninth Military Department (New Mexico Territory) in 1851, Captain Bowen was selected to serve as the chief commissary officer of the department. He and Katie traveled to St. Louis, up the Missouri River to Fort Leavenworth, and followed the Santa Fe Trail to Fort Union, where they arrived on August 21, 1851.

The Bowens' first child, Amelia, had died in infancy in 1850 while they were in Pennsylvania. Katie frequently mentioned Amelia (sometimes referred to as "Pet") in her letters, but most family references have been omitted in the following selections. Katie was pregnant when she traveled the Santa Fe Trail, and she gave birth to the first child born at Fort Union a few months after arriving there.

Katie Bowen was an energetic woman who enjoyed life, even life on the Santa Fe Trail and at Fort Union where she arrived before any quarters were constructed and lived in tents for several months. She was glad to be on the Santa Fe Trail after many delays in departure from Fort Leavenworth. Selections from her correspondence, portions of which were kept as a journal, are printed here for the first time. A few excerpts from her Fort Union letters are included to complete the story of Katie Bowen on the Santa Fe Trail.<sup>5</sup>

The Bowens traveled up the Missouri River from St. Louis on the steamboat Pocahontas and arrived at Fort Leavenworth on April 14, 1851. They expected to be on the road to New Mexico within two or three weeks but were delayed until June 21 because of weather and waiting for supplies. Meanwhile Katie kept her parents apprised of events. On April 15 she wrote to her mother:

3. Leo and Bonita Oliva are editing the entire collection of Bowen letters for publication.

4. Biographical information gathered by Gwladys Bowen, granddaughter of Katie and Isaac, in Bowen Family Papers. Gwladys Bowen was the daughter of William Cary Bowen, first child born at Fort Union in 1852. She preserved her grandparents' correspondence and made arrangements for it to be placed in the archives of the U.S. Army Military History Institute following her death. Gwladys Bowen previously had made available the Bowen letters written at Fort Union, New Mexico (transcripts in the Arrott Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas), but had not shared the remainder of the collection, including these letters on the Santa Fe Trail. The Bowen letters written at Fort Union were utilized in Chris Emmett, *Fort Union and the Winning of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965); Cheryl J. Foote, *Women of the New Mexico Frontier, 1846-1912* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990); and Leo E. Oliva, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1993).

5. Fort Union was located near the junction of the Cimarron Route, the original road to Santa Fe that opened to wagon traffic in the early 1820s, and the Bent's Fort or Mountain Route that opened to wagon traffic in the mid-1840s. Following the founding of this new post in 1851, much of the Santa Fe Trail traffic was routed through the environs of the fort. Thus Katie's Fort Union letters were also written on the Santa Fe Trail.

Our goods are in a good state of preservation and the worst of our journey is over. We were four



days and a half coming from St. Louis and met with no trouble. It is a dreadful river to navigate and we overtook a steamboat hung up on a sand bar that started a day before us. . . . I never saw

such a river—perfectly thick with mud—full of snags and sandbars. . . . From here I shall keep a journal. This is a delightful location and must be charming in the summer.

*On April 20 Katie wrote to her father from Fort Leavenworth.*

This is a very fine post. The country for miles around is charming. Uncle Sam has a very handsome farm and I would like it if our 160 acres were located there. The indians living near cultivate their land and are perfectly peacable. . . . Since we have been here, several parties have come in from Santa fe. Today Maj. [William N.] Grier arrived with two men, he came from a fort a hundred and fifty miles this side of Santa fe, in sixteen days.<sup>6</sup> He is going on to Philadelphia for his family. The wagons that are going on with us are encamping a few rods from here just under a hill. You cannot imagine how prettily their tents look these bright moonlight evenings, and then the men are so jolly, sitting on the grass singing or playing on their fiddles. . . . We do not know what day we will set out. Col Sumner will have command and he is expected here on the 25th or the first of the month at farthest.

6. Post at Rayado, New Mexico, a small military encampment established in 1850 and occupied until soon after Fort Union was founded in 1851.

*On May 10 Katie wrote her mother from Fort Leavenworth, explaining prospects for leaving.*

Col. Sumner came yesterday morning and there is a prospect of our going about the 20th. He is in excellent spirits and says there are so many ladies going out that he will have to give them the command day about. Eight are already here and more expected. . . . The Col thinks of having his headquarters this side of the mountains at a point called Los Vegas and about 180 [80?] miles nearer home. Every little helps, beside it is a fine country and the whole army will be turned into the farming field instead of fighting.



Uncle Sam is going to try farming on a grand scale, and I hope he may succeed. Isaac has purchased 500 cattle and is going to Weston today to buy a large quantity of winter wheat to experiment upon. You will be astonished as well as pleased if we succeed in making a farm.

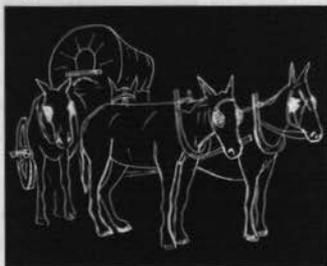
*The Bowens experienced a common problem when their Irish servant Mary left them at Fort Leavenworth to become the mate of a lonely man. Katie explained their solution to her mother: "we have bought a valuable negro woman of middle age and who is an experienced nurse."<sup>7</sup> Katie later explained that the young slave Margaret was "an excellent house servant. . . . Her mother is a free woman in Louisville and able to buy her, so if possible [when transferred from New Mexico], we will carry her to her mother or set her free."<sup>8</sup>*

*Although Katie anticipated they would soon be on the way to New Mexico, there were further delays. She wrote to her father and mother on May 17.*

7. Katie to Mother, May 10, 1851, Bowen Family Papers.

8. Katie to Father and Mother, February 29, 1852, *ibid.*

We are gathering up everything expecting to be off about the 25th but the Col cannot tell whether or no it will not be the first of June before he gets off so many men drilled to move. Trains are starting every day, and some of our goods have gone. Isaac's mules have come a day to two ago



but we have not tried them yet. They are warranted to be well broken, and a stately appearance we will make in our big waggon drawn by four mules. I don't think any persons, even the commander, will be as comfortable as we will. Isaac has fixed up every little convenience that can be imagined and even if we have to live in tents, until we can build an adobie house we will be very well off in warm weather. . . . It is such a common occurrence for ladies to cross the plains that nobody thinks anything of it. Maj [Ebenezer S.] Sibley is here with his third wife, a bride of a few months, and going with us. She says she is ignorant as a baby about housekeeping and hopes to live near me to learn something. Dont you think she is to be pitied if she has to take lessons from me? . . . The dragoons are encamped three miles from here preparatory to going, and their tents do look so white and cool on a sunny day, but must be rather damp in wet weather. We will prize our waggon on a rainy night. . . . Isaac has an excellent teamster, used to the road, and camping plans. Some of the stores have come up this week. The rains we have had in ten days has risen the river 8 feet so that most of the sand bars are covered now. . . . All of us ladies will wear calico wrappers on the march and most of the gentlemen wear flannels. . . . Our mess chest is grand. I have everything under my thumb and can tell where things go.

*On May 21 Katie wrote to her brother Holman.*

We did not expect to remain here after the first of May when we came, but the grass is backward and the river has been too low to bring up supplies. For ten days we have had heavy rains & "all nature" looks flourishing. . . . Col Sumner and the whole command start on Monday. Isaac will remain until Thursday to get started a large train of oxen, cows, pigs, sheep etc. Uncle Sam is going into the farming arrangement strong and if not successful, it will be one grand failure. Farming implements and seeds to the amount of \$10,000, and stock in proportion. I proposed that they harnessed the pigs and drove them backwards, but I believe they are going to start them for St. Joseph and feel pretty confident of reaching Santa fe ultimately. . . . Col Sumner will locate somewhere this side of the mountains where he can make a farm and will immediately set Mexicans and soldiers at work to make an adobie town. . . . If I shoot a buffalo you shall have the robe. . . . The crossing of the Arkansas is 300 miles from here and half way to our destination. We have some of the highest winds and biggest thunder that I ever saw or heard in any other place. Dust! Mercy, nothing but ice water will keep ones throat clear.

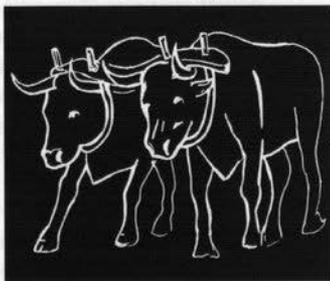
*The anticipated departure continued to be postponed to await additional supplies that Isaac was responsible for transporting to New Mexico. Katie kept her family informed. On May 31 she wrote her father and mother of further delays.*

The contractors have acted badly in not delivering their cattle, and Isaac cannot start until they were received and paid for, so one day slips by after another and we are still fixtures. If we cannot get off Monday or Tuesday with a company of dragoons going to the Arkansas, we will take the slow trip with Maj [Daniel H.] Rucker and his ox train, for he will have forty hardy western

men to assist in driving the cattle, and they will be as good as a regiment of recruits. Col Sumner and his large command started last Monday, and I went to camp to see them off.<sup>9</sup> The ladies were in good spirits and looked comfortable. . . . There has been some sickness [cholera] among the recruits that came off the boat two weeks ago, but not a case here in the garrison. . . . Col [Abraham R.] Wooley the indian agent will go with us, and if any appear, I expect we will see something interesting for he has a large quantity of presents for the stray tribes.

*Further delay resulted from heavy rains. On June 14 Katie wrote her mother.*

Are you not astonished to see another letter dated from here and at this late day. Well we are perfectly satisfied that things have turned out as they have, for we have not had one fair day through since the command left. The ground is completely saturated, and the oxtrain that was to leave today, are still waiting a day longer, because they gain no time in traveling while the roads are so wet.



When the roads get dry they will go twice as far in a day as they could now. . . . Those who went three weeks ago have had a sorry time. The heavy rains caused some sickness and one of the Surgeons [Alfred W. Kennedy] died eight days out. . . . Col Sumner sent to Weston a town above

here for a doctor to fill doct Kennedys place, and got an excellent one who has been an army surgeon. All of the troops were to encamp for a short time at Council Grove 150 miles distant from here. We will not endeavor to overtake them.

*On June 20 Katie informed her mother that, finally, they were ready to leave Fort Leavenworth.*

At last we can see our way through and we start tomorrow if nothing happens more than we can now see. Everything is done, and well done, and there are none who can be more comfortable than we are and will be if health is continued to us. The rains are over, I think. We frequently have showers, almost every day, but they are only pleasant, but [not] these tremendous soaking storms that frustrate everything. Wednesday we drove out nine miles to see how the teams were working, and find that the new cattle are getting quite used to the yoke. At first the[y] turned themselves inside out almost and cut up at a great rate, but they found at last that it would be much better to go quietly along and save their strength for future use. We have had a few days of very warm weather, and the muskitos are very thick in garrison. The parade is a grass plot, very thickly shaded with trees, and it is a fine place for the plagues. The first day we will be troubled probably, but as we have our netts along we dont care a fig. Maj Rucker has charge of the train, but after we overtake him he will probably mess with us. Then we will have five, Maj Rucker, Col Wooley (the indian agent), Isaac, his clerk & myself. Mr. Martin, Isaac's clerk, is [a] man about Shepards age and a most respectable gentlemanly person, very mild in his manners and always doing whatever he can to make all comfortable and pleasant. I hope we will be able to send you most cheering news of our progress, and shall give you a faithful account of everything.

9. Lieutenant John Pope, topographical engineer, accompanied Sumner's command and kept a detailed journal of the trip to New Mexico. He preceded Katie over the same route by a few weeks, and it is interesting to compare the two documents. See Michael Olsen and Harry Myers, eds., "John Pope's Journal of a March to New Mexico, 1851," *Wagon Tracks: Santa Fe Trail Association Quarterly* 5 (August 1991): 19-22 and 6 (November 1991): 15-19.

*Katie's first letter on the road to New Mexico was written to her mother on June 25, 1851.*

This, dear Mother, is the fifth days journey out from Fort Leavenworth and a most fortunate time we have had, fine clear cool weather and only one or two sprinkles of rain. We left the fort on Saturday [June 21] about 1 o'clock pm and drove thirteen miles to camp at a creek called the "Stranger" and had a good supper off [*sic*] boiled ham and butter biscuit, and as it was rather late, went early to bed but neglected to pin up our muskito net and the consequence was that we slept very little. The next morning we were up right early and off in time to make 23 miles. The scenery all along is charming, what is called the rolling prairie, fine grass and wood along the banks of the streams. Flowers grow in the greatest abundance and in great varieties. . . . Our second camping ground was as pretty a place as I ever saw, a sharp rise on the bank of a cool clear stream and no flies to trouble us. We have found delicious water thus far and tonight we have a clear sweet spring to fill our jars from. I have a stone jug covered with flannel which we keep wet and the air keeps the water cool. Isaac has a chart with all the camping places put down and marked with or without wood and water as the case may be and of course where there is none we will carry from the last place. I do not anticipate any difficulty in the want of wood & water. Last night we camped at "Soldier creek" where the ox wagons were crossing nearly all day. One of the soldiers who had been hard at work all day went in to bathe at night and got into a deep hole where he went down to come up no more. His comrades immediately went in after him but could not find him, and although they watched nearly all night and dragged the stream in several places, they had to leave this morning without finding him to bury. Today we have been crossing the Kansas or Kaw river & have not made more than five or six miles as we want to keep together and the ox teams cannot go far when they

have bad streams to cross. We stop when they get tired. It was fun to see the sheep, cows and calves swimming the river this morning. . . . This point is fifty five miles from the Fort and about a fourteenth part of our journey. . . . The men here at the ferry are french Indians and rapidly making fortunes in keeping this flat boat for accommodation of numerous travellers. I do wish you and Father could see this country. . . . We are not disturbed at night by anything when the mules hold their tongues. They cry for corn sometimes and do not get so well satisfied with this grass as with hay and corn.

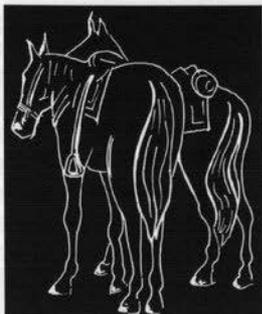
*The next letter, July 2, was written to "Father and Mother" from "Camp Eighty five miles from Leavenworth on a creek unknown name."*

We have been encamped here two nights and one day waiting for Maj Rucker and his train to come up, but as the roads are very bad in dry weather they are awful now, for we have had most heavy thunder storms both nights that we have stayed here and the mud holes are almost impassible for mule teams, so you may judge how oxen will cut down and stick fast. They are so slow. We are all right hearty and able to enjoy whatever fare is placed before us. I have written out our journey at length but as it was done in pencil I thought I would wait till we reached "Council grove" thirty miles from here then send you a lengthy copy. . . . Col Sumner reached Arkansas [river] on the 21st of June, but I do not wish we had been with them. They had good deal of sickness.

*As promised, Katie sent her notes from Council Grove on July 7.*

Pottawattamie creek, Thursday June 26 1851 3 5/m P.M. Just in camp, the men pitching tents, picketting horses & mules, building camp fires

and making all arrangements for spending the night. Isaac is grinding loaf sugar to put in the eye of his horse which is "sick" as the Indians say. We have had a delightful day thus far and although the sun is hot, we always have a fine breeze on these



plains. Our march has been slow today, for we did not get started till all the teams were ready, and then at seven miles we waited for the oxen to come up hoping they would be able to make thirteen miles today but they gave out at eight and we came on and will wait here tomorrow until they come up. We will have time to wash out towels, sheets, shirts and socks etc. We have passed over some of the handsomest farming country that ever was seen and the Pottawatamie settlement we passed through today boasts as fine gardens as the eastern towns. . . . Our camping ground tonight is lovely, a green bank sloping down to the stream, with plenty of shade and a glorious breeze. Today we have noticed several graves by the road side where the poor fellows of Col. Sumner's command lie buried after suffering the horrors of cholera and giving up the ghost, without friends to mark their mounds. We do most fervently bless God that we were detained till this fine weather set in, and feeling so strong and hardy. I can assure that a piece of boiled ham or pork and pickles taste just right. Yesterday we were in camp in time for soup and today we had decided upon ham and eggs with rice and stewed peaches & apples for dessert. We have delicious cream for coffee and waffles. Isaac is in the stream and the train is just fording at one side the men calling down big blessings on their oxen.

Wakarousa creek Friday night June 27. We waited this morning for the train to come up and it passed us at 10. Margaret got out quite a little

washing of flannels but as we could not wait for them to dry I hung the carriage full and we started for this ground at 12. The train has moved nine miles today but we have come but five to encamp with the rest. After this we intend to keep together if possible even if we do not move more than ten miles a day because it is so much pleasanter to see what is going on. . . . We have passed over all the worst of the road and crossed more than half of the streams. There have been many bad places where some of the teams have broken waggon tongues and hounds, but the carpenter steps into the woods, cuts a young hickory and soon the accident has made the waggon stronger than at first. It is about 30 miles from here to Council grove. . . . I am superintending the cooking of tomorrows dinner for in rains the fires will not life [*sic*] in the open air. Baked beans and boiled bacon, ham, bread and cold biscuit with mustard, pickles, peppersauce, butter eggs, etc., with brandy and water (or coffee) to wash it down. Rather primitive living you civilized folks will think, but let me tell you that these meals eaten in the open air taste as well as any thing ever did. . . . The richest kind of grass in abundance and flowers in infinite variety are to be seen on every side. I am trying to pick a few but we pass the prettiest ones in the open prairie during the day when I am shut up in the carriage and cannot always spend the time to gather them. . . . As soon as we are in camp tents are pitched and our trestle bedstead put down in one corner, a nice bed made up and most always I lie down for an hour and read or sleep as the fancy strikes me, then knit or sew to pass the time before dinner (which takes place at a genteel hour, 5 o'clock) afterwards take up these notes and devote the remainder of the evening to absent friends which occupation I enjoy vastly. The little cares of arranging our traps for starting or stopping are a pleasant recreation. One thing is not so pleasant, these prairie winds are making a complete squaw of me. I wear gloves as much as I can but a veil is so close that I prefer a tawny

skin to wearing it. . . . It is nearly time to stretch our mosquito bar and I will lay this aside till tomorrow and see if anything interesting occurs. House flies are around us in legions and bite like midges. 12 o'clock Saturday. Wakarousa stream still[,] June 28. Here we are fast stuck in the mud, quite unable to move till tomorrow even should the sun come out clear and warm. When we went to bed last night the clouds were lowering and the wind was blowing hard which brought up a big thunder storm just before daylight. It surely will cause a sinner to reflect upon his past life to be out on the open prairie with nothing between himself and the clouds save a few yards of "topsail duck," particularly when, as last night, the Heavens uncork their "phials [vials] of wrath" upon our devoted heads. . . . At daybreak we discovered that it would be necessary to have trenches cut around our tent, else we might betake ourselves to chanting I'm "afloat, I'm afloat," not exactly on the "wide raging sea," but on the broad, open prairie. Maj. Rucker thought it prudent not to move today, and we are fixing up to spend the remainder of the day here and another night on this camp ground. The men servants managed to make us a cup of coffee in the rain, and as we had a quantity of cream & biscuit, we did not fare badly for breakfast. Now at noon the clouds are giving place gradually to the "deep azure and gold" of a western sky and oh sentiment, our dinah has gone about baking beans and roasting a fat prairie chicken that one of the teamsters just brought me. We do not fare so badly as some would imagine and you town people with fastidious appetites have no idea how well we relish our homely mess. Our silver and china consists of tin and brittania, but we have a handsome walnut table to spread it upon. . . . Afternoon. Clouds again gather around us and most likely we will have a wet night. . . . It is a pretty sight to see this large herd grazing. . . . The white tents of the detachment are sprinkled about in soldier-like regularity and the men amusing themselves with mock auction of an old sieve of a hat war-

ranted the finest leghorn (and started at five cents) and some old pants that a Virginia housewife would hesitate to make floor cloth of.

Sunday afternoon, June 29. . . . Here we still are at Wakarousa but have been exerting ourselves to get on the other side of the stream. Yet even though we were packed and started before 7 o'clock this morning, we could not cross for the ox teams that started at 6 only crossed four of

their twenty in consequence of the stream rising very rapidly. We waited patiently on the bank till half an hour ago, when despairing of the water falling sufficient for us to ford tonight, we turned back and selected a camping place. One of Maj Ruckers mule teams attempted to cross a few minutes ago, and getting part of the waggon body under water, the current took the lead mules off their feet, and before they could be liberated, two had drowned. Men immediately swam in to cut their harness but the poor beasts floundered so much it was dangerous to go near them. Mules are singular birds, bipeds or beasts as the case may be a conglomeration of the three. The moment they feel their big ears wet they give up all idea of living and sink at once. . . .

Monday morning 1/2 past 8. This is the last day of June and a bright bracing one it is. There was frost on the grass at daylight, and with three blankets and a comforter we were scarcely able to keep warm during the night. This climate seems somewhat like home, to have these clear cool mornings of summer turn into mild lovely afternoons. We are tardy in getting started this morning because the heavy teams are crossing the stream before us. The water is completely down now, but leaves the road that was overflowed very soft. Maj Rucker had decided bad



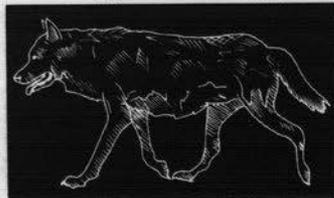
luck yesterday. His waggon had to stand in the water till another team could get to his assistance, after the drowning of his mules, and the consequence was that his packages in the front part of the waggon were completely saturated. . . . He had them spread in the sun to dry, such a medley no one ever saw. We had had three trunks in the back of the waggon, and they only got their covers wet, very fortunate we consider ourselves. . . . We leave at 10 and trust to get through the stream safely. . . . After a glorious breakfast of hot rolls, hot coffee, hot beafsteaks, I feel equal to the task of traveling fifty miles before sleeping.

Tuesday July 1st. I dont know how far we came yesterday, but this I do know, that we are in camp today waiting for the Maj to come up. We passed him yesterday some miles back and hoped he might make this camp last night with his teams, but the prairie was so badly cut up and there were so many mud holes to pass that he could not get the oxen over, and as we came easily enough (probably fifteen miles) we are all day in camp waiting for him. We had a tremendous thunder storm this morning about daylight which continued till 12m and I am quite sure that the fords will be so bad that the Maj wont get here before tomorrow. We are on a side hill, well protected by trees, else the wind today would take us off bodily. The streams have very steep banks and for oxen exceeding hard to ascend, but the little mules are so light and quick that they are up to the top before one thinks they have time to fasten their toes in the soft soil. In the morning we passed the camping spot where Dr. Kennedy died, and we noticed the tall grass waving over the mounds of soldiers, and one "camp woman" was also buried. Near where we are now encamped, Col Sumner remained with his command some days and is called his wet camp. We noticed deep trenches dug around where his tents were pitched and a sorry time many must have had who came along then. Our tent sheds rain well, and we have room to spread a bed, set a table, and then a little to spare. When

the evenings look like rain Isaac has a small ditch made under the eaves and in case of a shower, our floor is left dry. . . . At breakfast time the rain was pouring so fast that the men could scarcely keep the fire, but we managed to get a cup of coffee to send to Col Wooley and Mr. Martin in their tents, and we drank ours without the parade of setting a table. . . .

July 2nd. Still remaining at the same camp. More rain last night, and we all had to leave our beds and stand by the tent poles to keep them upright. I never saw such continual flashes of lightening or as bright and the rain did come down in the biggest drops and the most of them. Yet we do not feel any ill effects from this constant exposure. Not a stiff joint or cold have I heard complained of since leaving Leavenworth. This morning we had an opportunity of sending letters out, and I wrote two short ones. . . . The roads are in a shocking state and so many bad crossings for oxen that they do not make more than five miles a day. . . . At this rate of travel we will be most likely to spend Christmas on the plains, but we hope for better things. . . . Shades of evening are gathering round and I must retire within our "white house" 9 by 9. I do wish you good dear folks could see our camp.

July 3d Thursday. . . . We have been living in camp all day again. Maj Rucker's train came up this afternoon, and we will be off tomorrow morning. I have had ironing done today and got soundly laughed at for indulging in the luxury. I did not intend having any washing done, but with plenty wood and water, a strong servant with nothing else to do, it seemed like laziness to carry along a bag of soiled clothing. We keep our big dog chained to the waggon in front of our tent, at night, but he must have slept wondrous sound last night for a wolf went to the fire and ate what scraps



were left in the pots, rattled among the tin pans so that the teamsters were disturbed, and then put out for the herd. He had a big fight with an old gentleman sheep in trying to get one of the lambs, but the old fellow kept him on the defensive so long, and whipped him so badly, that at daylight one of the sentinels discovered how matters stood and finished the career of Mr. Wolf. They are so tame that we often see them in the road directly in front of us, but they soon hide themselves in the long grass. . . .

July 4th, At a small creek with a clean stony bottom, and I shall call it Rock creek. . . . We left camp this morning at 1/4 7 o'clock and have had a pretty good days journey. In three miles we struck the Independence road, and it really was a luxury to slip along on a decent track. It has been traveled these thirty years and is as hard beaten as a rock. There are some ruts to be sure, after these severe rains, but nothing to impede our progress. This morning at ten o'clock we met Col [William] Hoffman and family on their way out from Fort Mackey at the crossing of the Arkansas, whither they went eight months ago and built this fort, and are now ordered to Texas.<sup>10</sup> They do not like the change at all, with the prospect of having another fort to construct. When Col Sumner reached Arkansas his second surgeon was sick, and he remained to go on with us, so we have something to look forward to, having a pleasant gentleman added to our company, and he a surgeon, which at present we are without, but I certainly hope we may not require his services. . . . After today's journey being so successful, I have some hopes of getting through before Christmas, but Col Hoffman informed us that there had been no rain at the Arkansas for ten months, and I much fear that the rainy season may set in before we pass that point and if so,

10. This military post located west of present-day Dodge City had been founded as Camp Mackey in 1850 and soon was renamed Fort Atkinson. Katie and others continued to call it Mackey. See Leo E. Oliva, "Fort Atkinson on the Santa Fe Trail, 1850-1854," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Summer 1974): 212-33.

what shocking roads we will find. However we wont borrow trouble but take everything as quietly as we can. Col Sumner was forced to take the long route by Bents fort as the Cimerone route 70 miles shorter was destitute of water and grass. We have been singularly favoured in finding streams and springs of pure sweet water, plenty of dry wood, and the finest grass in the world. We see numerous persons going to and coming from Santa fe and I think we will often have opportunities to send out our charming productions. No doubt Col. Sumner is within two hundred miles of Los Vegas. They will be in time to make houses for us. Mrs. Hoffman told me that she likes the Arkansas country and that a sister of hers at Los Vegas spoke in high terms of the climate and never was in as good health. Well, I go to sleep and forget the poor fourth of July.

Bluff Creek, July 5th. 8 1/2 Evening. We got into camp at 2 o'clock, after making a march of thirteen miles. The day has been fine and airy though rather warm in the sun, but the oxen traveled off bravely. The country is much the same as at Leavenworth, fine rolling farming country. We move now thirteen miles a day, and I believe the Maj intends going twenty after the oxen get used to this good road. The streams are beautiful, clear gravel bottoms, and skirted with a scanty but pretty wood. This is certainly the prettiest creek that I ever saw, banks rising in abrupt bluffs but patches along the shore quite



level with the stream. Mr Martin went out and soon returned with a string of little sun fish for our dinner. This morning just before starting, two Indians rode into camp, driving mules. They were the most frightful looking objects I ever saw, painted a bright scarlet color all over their faces, hair cut over the crown of the

head, quite like a cropt mane, feathers stuck in the back of the hair, bodies entirely naked, with the exception of a piece of red flannel or cloth answering the purpose of a fig leaf. They had fine bows and arrows and amused the soldiers much in trying their skill at a mark for a penny a hit. We doubtless shall see very many before reaching our destination, but traders whom we have seen assure us that they are perfectly peaceable this year, their only desire being to beg or steal flour or provisions. We all remain perfectly well owing no doubt to the good water we drink so freely of. I hope we may not fall short of a supply before we get through, but most likely we must meet some inconveniences. Clouds tonight indicate a storm, but as they have passed over three nights, I think they may now. Our cow is a treasure, giving cream almost, and even now our big dog Bruno is lapping up a quart or two warm from the bucket. . . . In a day or two we expect to meet a company of dragoons coming from Fort Mackey, wither they have but just gone. They are ordered back to go on an expedition with some hair brained Indian agent, who has made the president believe his services are worth two thousand dollars a year and furnished, when to tell truth he will do the Indians more harm than good. They do not thank him for his pains, nor glass beads either. . . . We thought to leave this grove today, but some work had to be done which will keep us till tomorrow the 8th. This place is 118 miles from Leavenworth.

*After leaving Council Grove, Katie continued with her daily journal entries and forwarded them with her periodic correspondence.*

Cotton wood creek Thursday, July 10th. . . . We did not leave Council Grove on Monday as we expected as all the horses and mules had to be shod and could not get them done in time. We left early on Tuesday morning and came sixteen miles to a camp by "diamond spring" and in-

deed it is a diamond in the prairie, the water as clear and cool as ice. We had a pretty camping spot, had good night's rest, a pleasant shower to lay the dust, and started on Wednesday morning in good spirits for "Lost Spring," a pretty bubbling pool, quite sunk in the ground but affording plenty of water for a thousand teams. There is not a shrub to be seen anywhere within five miles, and we brought our wood from diamond spring, 19 miles back. Here at Cottonwood we have a great abundance of wood and water and must carry wood from here to last us sixty miles, allowing for long marches in case of bad traveling. We have come seventeen miles today and have got up with the big train. They have been waiting twenty days for us to come up. They started from the fort with forty days rations, expecting that we would be one week behind them and they have been out forty days today, and by some mismanagement have been out of flour ten or twelve days, consequently they have been living on meat and corn, in the mean time, no danger of starving with seventy-five pigs and fifty beeves. A great quantity of little porkers have come along these last few days for the pleasure, I suppose, of a journey across the plains. Wag-gons have been fixed with wickerwork to carry the little fellows until they get strength to walk part of the day at least. The weather is very fine and not too warm for the animals. The dews are very heavy and afford moisture enough for the teams even if there was no water. They will not taste water from the streams in the morning. We expect to reach Fort Mackey on the 25th and I will write again from there. . . . Isaac sends love and says that he considers himself in bad luck anyway, but intends to get through with all difficulties as smoothly as possibly. The morning we left Council grove, a hatchet fell from the carriage spring into the side of his knee, and though a very bad cut it is healing gradually. He is very careful not to exercise on it. The same time he broke a watch crystal that he has worn eight or nine years, and I emptied a bottle of ink over a

dozen yards of delicate ruffling I had just finished for pillowcases. Truly misfortunes never come singly. The last mentioned calamity was remedied by sour milk, & the others are doing well. This evening is so fine that I am having our chests and trunks opened to get an airing. Everything in as good order as when we left home. We consider ourselves very fortunate to have succeeded so well thus far. Although we are traveling slowly, and we sometimes find it tedious, still we are all perfectly well and can endure a long trip. We met an empty train yesterday coming out. They report grass rather scanty, along the Arkansas, so much so that the Indians are obliged to leave and go farther into the back country to support their ponies. Four thousand savages have been at and about Fort Mackey all the spring but will be gone before we reach there, and we wont be sorry. . . .

July 12th By Turkey Creek. Saturday morning. We got here yesterday at 2 o'clock after making 18 1/2 miles. The pigs behaved very well, only three or four had to be put in the wagon. Our great worthless dog gave out and we had to take him in, quite to my disgust, for my love of dogs is not great. Water today has been very inconveniently timed, one creek 7 miles and another 26 miles, and we must manage to divide the space even if we have to carry along water for the small animals. Our mules could well enough travel the whole distance, but we do not like the idea of separating from the train. A large Mexican merchant train and a government train have joined us for safety. No Indians have made their appearance in any numbers. . . . We are now 187 miles from Leavenworth and this is the twenty second day out, though to be sure we have not been travelling all the time. Yet when we think of the distance and how easily we might pass over it in a day on some of our railroads at home, it seems awful to be poking along at this rate. Very little that is interesting occurs. The same routine each day. Yesterday we saw two antelopes bounding across the prairie in front of us and



rabbits in abundance. Some of the men caught one. They are much larger than our rabbits and are fine eating, but Isaac said he was glad I did not get one as I would fuss all day to cook it. . . .

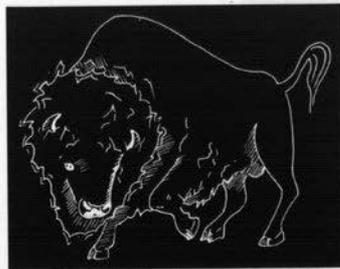
Evening. We are encamped 18 miles from

our starting point this morning and no water except a pond or hole, quite good to the taste. The little Arkansas is eight miles ahead. Grass is not very substantial food to work upon, and we give the animals time to fill themselves to the throat. The wind has blown hot all day, dust bad. We had great sport this morning. Our driver pointed out two Buffaloes about two miles ahead. Isaac loaded his pistol, mounted his horse and put him to his speed. I watched the chase with delightful visions of smoked tongue and the delicious hump of one of them for dinner. When of a sudden, just before crossing a ravine, I saw Isaac turn his horse and with a disgusted pace, return to the carriage. When he got within hailing distance he said, "You man, when next you send me after buffalo, be first assured that it is not a man or two on horseback." Lo & behold the two objects were men from the train hunting water or lost cattle, and my disappointed appetite must wait another and I hope more successful opportunity. . . .

Sunday evening, July 13th. We reached this place, 15 miles from our last night's camp at a few moments past 1 o'clock and although the wind has been high all day, there has [been] scarcely a drop to breathe, coming all day along within sight of the sand hills forming the banks of the big Arkansas, the sun pouring down on the white surface, and the wind blowing over it as hot as from a burning furnace. We are encamped tonight at some large holes, giving us good water, although rather warm, and I would

give a dollar for a lump of ice as big as a hens egg. We have a large jug covered with flannel and if kept wet, will cool the water pleasantly. We intended making 18 miles today, but the pigs preferred remaining in a mud puddle than going a few miles farther. Tomorrow we go to Cow creek, 12 miles and take half a days rest. We crossed little Arkansas this morning, where we found springs of good water, but the river was but a rivulet with banks 20 or 25 feet high which are full at certain seasons of the year. The bottom is all quick sand and our waggon master told us that in years past he alone had put in twenty feet of logs, dirt & brushwood, but now all is sunk. No accident occurred. Three Indians joined us a few miles back and followed us to camp. . . . Wolves are barking all about us, and a few moments ago Mr Martin called to us to bring him a stick to kill a rattlesnake, and sure enough he killed one seven years old. Its back was broken and the venomous thing bit itself in a dozen places and covered the end of a stick with poison. We had him securely buried and burned the weapon that killed him. Isaac got the rattles which I send to Matty [Katie's nephew].

*Excerpts from her letter to Matty, July 18, 1851, follow.*



Dear little Matty. I promised to write you a letter the first live Buffalo we saw, and now they are all around us in thousands, completely besplat-

tering the plains with their huge forms. . . . Yesterday morning as we were coming along through dense herds of buffalo, Uncle Isaac shot a big old fellow, but his skin was very bare and he did not have it taken off. His tongue was cut

out. They are very nice, and I have some pickled. I wish you and Willie could see these wild old buffaloes. They grumble all night, sounding like distant thunder, or waves breaking on the shore. Thousands & tens of thousands are every where to be seen, and a great many tribes of Indians are through the country, laying in their winter supply of meat and making the robes to wrap you little boys in when you go out sleighing. We find no trouble with the Indians. They come into camp to beg or sell their dried meat. . . . Our waggon master last evening brought us a live buffalo calf some months old, but he must have hurt the little thing as it only lived a few hours. They are homely things, but you would like to see the humps on their shoulders and see their long manes hanging to the ground. They are fierce old fellows. The cows are rather pretty, more like deer and always lead the herd.

*Katie's journal continued.*

Saturday evening, July 19. I wrote to Matty last night, and tonight I sit outside my tent watching the enormous herds of buffalo, not more than a mile distant, grazing as peacefully as if no danger ever came near them. We are at Coon creek, having come 15 miles today and 60 miles from Fort Mackey, which will be more than half way by the short route to Santa fe, and about half way by the long route. Since we came into camp, three buffaloes have been killed within sight of our tent. Our herd of cows attract them, and they come amongst them. Two tongues have been given me and are now boiling, ready to be pickled. The meat of a calf or cow is delicious, and in this climate readily dries without salt and will keep sweet any length of time. . . . For several days we have been passing through "dog towns." They cover acres and acres, little holes a few feet apart and deeper than anyone knows. We tried this morning to drown some out and poured many buckets full of water into their

holes without any success. While running down, the water sounded 20 or 30 feet below the surface. They are as big as kittens a week or two old and when we approach, sit at the opening of their holes and bark right sharply, wag their little tails and disappear. We frequently see owls sitting on their holes and are told that with the rattlesnake, they form a charming society in their houses. Night before last we had wretched water. It was formerly a running stream, but now only standing in pools and the buffalo have been wallowing through them all. Judge of the extract. The same night there was scarcely a blade of grass for the animals, fortunately we had corn and more fortunate still it rained during the night and since then we have had showers which have laid the dust and made the grazing sweet. This grass, called "buffalo grass" is very short and as fine as hair and is very substantial. We travel every day now in sight of the Arkansas, but its sandy bed is dry, yet we get fine water by digging. The air today is very pleasant and not too warm. If good luck attends us, we will reach our destination by the first of September, allowing time for accidents and bad weather. I passed over several days of my notes because I was actually too lazy to do anything. No Indians have been seen for three days and we are told that they have always left about this time. There is to be a "big talk" at Laramie and every tribe is invited. The last mail carried had some trouble with the Pawnees, and they will be afraid this government train will punish them. All profess friendship except the Camanches, and they swear deadly vengeance against the Mexicans. The Apaches, Arapahoes, Pimos, Pawnees, Chians, Shawnees and Camanches are all troublesome, and nobody knows how many more may be onesided. At the worst we can defend ourselves.



Sunday afternoon July 20th. Twenty or more miles today, a fine cool airy day, but little water, and still less grass. Our camp is on the bank of the big Arkansas, not a drop of water above the sand, but plenty a few inches below the surface. We are past the buffalo country, but any quantity of wolves are constantly at pistol shot, yet no one feels disposed to waste powder and balls for them. Weeds and flowers are abundant in this horrid sand. Cactuses in great perfection. . . . The ground in many places is covered with salt, and the small streams have quite a marshy smell. The cattle are frantic to feed continually. The pigs get on bravely. When no water is found in the road, the drivers empty a cask and let them wallow.

July 23, Wednesday morning, Fort Mackey. At last we are here, after toiling a month to reach 380 miles. We arrived yesterday afternoon and were most kindly received by Lieut [Henry] Heth, who immediately gave up his pleasant quarters for us. We thought it not just right to turn the commander out, but he insisted so strongly and the shaded rooms looked so inviting, that it was not in my power to be indifferent to his hospitality. It was very grateful to once more move beneath a roof and sleep in a civilized way within doors. No lady is here, and only one officer and a surgeon. Most of the build-



ings are made of sods, covered with a cement of clay, and cloth roofs. This house is of adobies and plastered inside & out, a board roof, covered with tarpaulin, and the rooms ceiled with the same. All very comfortable, and looking exceedingly neat and pretty. There is no vegetation whatever, having had no rain for a year, and the cattle are herded several miles from here, where a narrow strip of grass grows close by the river. I hope we may be as warmly welcomed and find as pleasant a habitation when we reach our des-

tinuation. All the Indians have left here. Several thousand lodges were spread around here a few weeks ago, but all are now hunting and laying in their stores of furs. While here they had a Mexican woman, who had been stolen and she was so unhappy that the sutler bought her, intending I believe to send her to Chihuahua. She has an indian child about a year old, and they made her carry wood all day and herd mules all night. They are very cruel to their women. She says her father and mother were killed and herself and three sisters carried off, that she has been their slave for four years. In my last letter I mentioned meeting Mrs Hoffman. She has been at this post some time and was sorry to leave. We will leave these letters to go out by the first opportunity, and we may have no other chance to send in till we reach Los Vegas. At any rate we will be there before you get this.

*On July 23 at Fort Atkinson, which she called Mackey, Katie added to her earlier letter to Matty.*

We came here yesterday and are going away tomorrow morning. Tell Grandma that the bachelor here has entertained us well, and insisted this morning that his man cook must make some ice cream, the poor fellow probably never heard of the thing before, but said he could freeze it, & I mixed it for him, but the best joke was bringing it on table in a tin twelve quart pail. We had great sport at the sight, but it tasted well nevertheless. The greatest abundance of ice is here, and I begged to be locked up in it last night. It was very refreshing to taste a cool drop of water on reaching here. We expect to go through in 30 days from here.

*A few days later Katie resumed writing in her journal.*

Sunday evening, July 27, on the banks of the Arkansas. This is the fourth day out from Fort

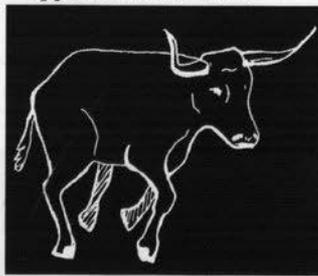
Mackey, and we have accomplished sixty miles. Nothing of importance occurred until yesterday morning after we had been marching several hours. Isaac was riding in the carriage and told the man to drive to the river to water the mules. As we approached the bank we noticed large herds of cattle grazing on the opposite shore and immediately pronounced them wild, but before we got to the river Maj Rucker rode up calling, Bowen don't you see the Indians? Where? was the first inquiry, and immense droves of horses were pointed out to us, which we had supposed cattle, and on looking along the road, a few miles in front, discovered a great many lodges, although no Indians had made their appearance. The Maj ordered a halt till all the waggons came up, and he with a man who speaks a little of several languages, rode out to see the prospect. As they climbed the hill, a Subchief issued from the earth on horseback (for no one could tell how he got where he was unless the earth vomited him) and explained the party to be part of the tribe of Kiowas, who are out to fight the Pawnees, who recently killed one of their number. Expressed themselves friendly, and the one lone Indian went with us to our waggons. Just then, as fate would have it, an axeltree in one of the waggons broke, which of course would compel us to stop for repairs and give the appearance of remaining on account of our weakness, and fear to pass the encampment, and we were afraid the effect would be bad upon the Indians. But the Maj took the chief to the waggon, and explained what detained us. Then selected a camp, and we pitched our tents in good order for resistance, if necessary. The Maj smoked with the Indian and gave him luncheon, by and by men, women, and children poured in upon us, and of what we had we fed them.



One sprightly woman, the fifth in rank of the chiefs wives, is a Mexican, and Isaac questioned her all about the tribe and herself. She said that she was taken prisoner by this tribe in Chihuahua ten years ago, when she was quite a child, that she had been made a wife by the chief and although they treated her well enough, she would much like to be mounted on a swift horse and make her way home. Says the tribe is friendly to all Americans but hate the Mexicans. The head wife was wrapped in a common blanket and displayed a large quantity of brass wire twisted around her bare arms for bracelets. The Mexican wife was covered with a piece of course blue cotton duck with buckskin stockings & shoes and performed the service of drudge to the first squaw, picketing out her horse and giving her the best morsels to eat. She wore no ornaments and was mean enough looking. She said her hair was luxuriant when she was captured, but they made her cut it all off. We showed her a small looking glass and she said that in her home in Mexico she used to have large ones, but had none now. One Indian who prided himself on his fine dress, had an old tin cup with the bottom knocked out, for a bracelet and a braided horse's tail attached to his head, which dragged on the ground, and was covered with tin broaches. Among them was one Pawnee woman and two children who had been taken prisoners. She said that she had been to Santa fe, and was taken there while living with her husband a frenchman, by name Jimmy Lee, that one of the children was his by a white wife, and when she was stolen she took the child with her because she was jealous of her husband. The Maj offered to take her to Santa fe for the sake of restoring the little girl (who is ten years old) but the woman was afraid to run away and was afraid to give up the child, although she had compunction of conscience for stealing her, and would be glad to have her restored to her father. She told us that Mr White's child is in this tribe, but at present is with the warriors, hunting Buffalo, and will be in

camp in six days.<sup>11</sup> What a pity that these children cannot be rescued. Our party was not strong enough to take them, and many of the indians showed indignation that we petted the white children and scorned theirs. This Pawnee woman speaks good English and Spanish and had the two children dressed like Americans. They troubled us none after dark. The Maj told them to be off, and not come within the line of sentinels. This morning they were all ranged along the road to see us depart, and we have not heard from them since.

July 28th. This day has been most oppressive, not a breath of air, and the dust intolerable. Every appearance of rain and we hope for it. Isaac shot a young antelope and we had a quarter baked for dinner. I had the skin dried as a trophy. No signs of Indians, and they will keep away from our shooting irons. This is Father Bowens birthday and we intended to eat the butternuts he put up for us, but upon opening the box discovered them to be quite rancid, and we were greatly disappointed in our feast.



29th. Hot, dusty and very hard on the animals. The oxen will surely die if the Maj persists in these long marches, for six days we have averaged 16 miles a day and without

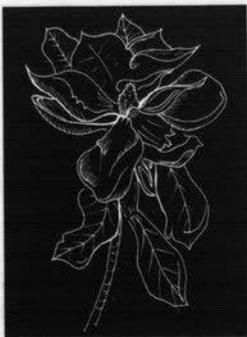
rain. The cattle seem suffocated with dust. These

11. On October 24 or 25, 1849, the party of James M. White was attacked by Jicarilla Apaches while traveling westward on the Santa Fe Trail, at a point near the New Mexico Point of Rocks, probably at or near Palo Blanco or White Creek. This became known as the White Massacre. James White and the other men in the party were killed. Mrs. White (Ann), their daughter (Virginia), and a female servant were captured. All attempts to secure their release failed. Ann White was killed by her captors when a rescue attempt was made on November 17, 1849. The body of little Virginia White was never found, and it was later reported by Jicarillas and others that she had been killed. Nevertheless, some believed she may have survived, and the search for the girl continued for several years, without success. See Oliva, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest*, 24. Katie Bowen's report that Virginia White was still alive in 1851, even though Katie never saw the child, is new evidence in this case.

clouds in any other country would turn out rain, but here I believe all signs fail, at least all rain signs, behind and before us rain poured about 2 o'clock, but here only a few drops fell, not sufficient to retard the progress our driver was making. We see nor hear anything of Indians.

30th. This morning we are late in getting off, and I write to kill time. Every morning for a week we have got started at 5 1/2 and reached camp after 2 o'clock. Our marches are not now so pleasant because we do not separate, in case any Indians come upon us unawares. Last night the wolves serenaded us from all directions, and after we had been in bed some time, the mosquitoes made their appearance, forcing me to get up and stretch our net. The sky is overcast just now, and I do not desire to see the sun today.

Monday, Aug 4th. It has been some days since I have noticed anything worth recording. This afternoon we are encamped one mile below Bents Fort, or rather what was Bents Fort, now nothing but ruins, and it is entirely abandoned. For several days the weather has been quite cool, and this morning great coats and shawls were in demand. Now at 3 o'clock it is hot enough to kill niggers. We intend going to the "last camp on the Arkansas" tomorrow, which is only 9 miles, and spend the remainder of the day in recruiting the animals for a march of 26 miles without water. We are making very good time now, averaging 17 miles a day since leaving Mackey 12 days ago. We have made a calculation to be at Vegas 230 miles, in two weeks from today. Nothing crosses our path of interest, we have plenty of wood water and grass. Flowers abound and are very brilliant, but quite too coarse for pressing. I gathered some prairie grass seed, which produces grass that will keep oxen fat traveling 15 to 20 miles daily, and



heavily loaded too. No Indians trouble us, and we distinctly see the tracks of Col Sumners command, which passed over one month ago, in a very bad storm one would judge, as the ruts are deep and numerous. We are on their old camping ground tonight, and the whole face of the earth is literally alive with ants.

Wednesday evening August 8th. One year ago this day I left home for Philadelphia, a happy daughter, wife, and mother. Many changes have taken place to render this year much less peaceful, here thousands of miles from home, though enjoying as many comforts as any one can have on the plains. The first blessing is health, and we do fully appreciate it. Yesterday morning we passed Bents Fort, and camped on the bank of the Arkansas. The location of Bents fort is very pretty, and the works must have been fine a few years ago. It was a strong fortification, built of unburned brick, and from the road appeared to be well arranged for defense. It abounds in bastions, towers, walls & block houses, but I am not sufficiently versed in tactics to describe it. . . .

August 11th. Here we are fairly among the Raton Mountains, at a small stream without a name, but a tributary to the Purgatory. Pretty name isn't it. I have not noted much since writing last, but some little things of importance have occurred, among the prominent ones, Isaac shot a rattlesnake today eleven years old, so the rattles indicated. For five nights the grass has been very scant, much resembling frost bitten stubble, but the animals will eat anything to fill up. Water has been limited and poor. . . . Yesterday we passed Purgatory, a rapid muddy stream, and if anybody asked your opinion of the place, tell them it is very bad for a daughter of yours once spent a night there, and did not bring away a favourable impression. As if paradise were distantly connected with the place, after passing Purgatory we came into a plain filled not exactly with milk & honey, but fruit and flowers of great variety. Our Mothers apple was not growing there, but we saw grapes (pretty sour ones) plums &

gooseberries. Woodbine, clematis, locust, and various plants, which I will not mention. . . . Tomorrow we reach the Summit of Raton Pass, and after we cross, expect to find good springs and grass during the remaining 130 miles.

August 13th, Wednesday morning. This point is called "The Springs" and we reached here yesterday noon after making about 11 miles over the mountains and through the valleys, sometimes traveling along the rocky bed of a small stream that we crossed at least 20 times in ten miles. I never saw such hills and sometimes I thought the carriage would fall over the mules, in spite of lock chains, but we cleared the summit without accident and are now descending the mountains gradually, though our next ten or twenty miles will be worse than we have seen. Today we are staying over for the benefit of the animals, as there is fine grass in these ravines, and they are very tempting after four or five days without grass or scarcely any food. All of the ox teams did not get up last night in consequence of a violent thunder storm which made the mountain sides too slippery and dangerous to proceed. They are all here this morning safe. Storms in these mountains are terrific. The reverberation is stunning and the rain pours down in torrents, threatening to sweep away everything. . . .

Monday noon, August 18th. This is an old camp called Beaubien valley [Rayado], and has been occupied by dragoons until very lately. We are within 36 miles of Col Sumners new post, and I am very impatient to get through, see the ladies, and have some gossip as well as feel at home once more. At a small stream where we stopped to speak with a party of Mexicans, Kit Carson rode out from a ranch close by and brought us intelligence from camp. This is the first day we have come within sight of settlements, and this little one called Riyado is set under a hill in quite a pretty valley, and might be made a garden if any Yankee had it. The troops that were here have a fine garden a mile distant. I am teasing for some of the green stuff, but can wait a day or two



longer. Since writing last we have had abundance of game, turkey, deer, antelope, hare, and "nothing shorter" than a bear. I had some cooked. Mr Martin pretended to be very fond of it, probably to be in fashion, but Isaac turned his mouthful

over several times and at last "gave it up." The 14th we came over one hill three quarters of a mile up, and the same down, and of all the places we read of, judge. We made three miles in three hours. It was formed of loose large round stones or rather rocks, piled up like stairs, and such a getting up stairs, and down again, no mortal but those who cross Raton mountains can conceive. Each individual rock rolled with the wheels, which sent the waggons dancing on nothing. I rode up, but could not bring my mind to ride down, so away I footed it over rocks, bushes, briars and all, but got to the bottom at last. Since then we have had pleasant roads, through valleys of good grass & excellent water. Tonight we find a cool, clear spring. Frequent thunder storms have filled the beds of the streams, and in this country are called rivers, but in reality are the size of Uncle Irvings brook. The names are so crooked that I cant spell them. I have not lately kept a daily journal because there has nothing occurred worth spending ones time for.

*On August 24 Katie wrote to inform her mother that the journey was finished.*

At last we are at our destination, safe in every particular, in health, and our goods in as good order as anything could possibly be after the hard journey they have had. I for one have not found the trip at all annoying. The time did not seem long, for every thing was pleasant, weather

and country. This point is one hundred miles nearer home than Santa fe, located particularly with a view to the extensive farming operations, and certainly it is well adapted, plenty of water, abundance of wood and to all appearance a fertile valley, with mountains on two sides of us. The hills are close by and timbered with pine, red or pitch pine I believe, any way it makes good lumber & fire wood, and will not fail a supply in thousands of years. We are putting up quarters as fast as possible of timber and adobies and in the mean time we are living in tents. . . . This point is supplied with a delicious spring, and we have its waters brought twice a day. For the stock and for irrigating, there are several ponds and one lake. The river Moro runs six miles below us. . . . This is a pretty country and I hope will be easily cultivated. With many well wishes and true affection I am ever your daughter Katie.

*On Christmas Day 1851 the Bowens hosted a dinner for the officers and wives at the post, with sixteen guests at their table. The menu included a roast pig, saddle of venison, fillet of veal, cold roast fowls with jellies, and "all the fixins." They finished the first Christmas dinner at Fort Union with coffee and fruit cakes baked by Katie.<sup>12</sup> On January 7, 1852, Katie de-*

12. Katie to Father and Mother, January 1, 1852, Bowen Family Papers.

*livered William Cary Bowen, the first child born at Fort Union.*

*Katie subsequently noted that she and Isaac truly liked being stationed at Fort Union on the Santa Fe Trail, "where we can live on our pay and have good health." They feared being "stationed in some unhealthy city."<sup>13</sup> That fear was well founded.*

*They left Fort Union for Albuquerque in late 1853 and left New Mexico in 1855. Later Isaac and Katie were sent to New Orleans, an "unhealthy city" which they feared, and then to Pass Christian, Mississippi. Tragically, they both died there of yellow fever in 1858, as did one of their children. The remaining children were taken and reared by Isaac's brother. William Cary Bowen, who was born at Fort Union, later had a military career, and his daughter Gwladys had the good sense to preserve the magnificent treasure, the correspondence of her grandparents.*

*Katie Bowen's letters on the Santa Fe Trail add new details to the history of that overland route and establish her as an important member of the select group of women travelers who wrote significant accounts about life along the road. Katie deserves to be as well known as her more famous contemporary women writers, and publication of the entire collection of Bowen letters should bring her such recognition.*

[KH]

13. Katie to Mother, March 29, 1853, *ibid.*