

Exact copy of a letter written by William Porter enroute to Oregon, to his father, David Porter, in Pike County, Illinois in 1848. Donald Porter of the St. Boniface Archives & Museum in Sublimity, Oregon is a great great grandson of William Porter. He had received a typewritten carbon copy from Mary E. Porter, typeset here.

Crossing of the North Fork
of Platte, June 24, 1848

Dear Father, Mother, Brothers and Sisters,

I wrote a few lines to you a few days ago, but lest they should not reach you, I will write as though I had not written at all. We are all well, and getting on as well as common. Some of our company are a little discouraged on account of fatigues of the journey and the reports in reference to the Indians in Oregon. I have felt a little discouraged, sometimes, about the scarcity of grass, though our cattle look well. As a general thing, there is no difficulty in finding good camping places till you get to Laramie, thence to this place there is but one or two good camps. Grass is not as good this season as it commonly is. I will make a few suggestions from experience, which you may profit by should you ever travel this road. In reference to wagons, oxen, etc: I would say: bring wagons made of the best materials and thoroughly seasoned and then have some black-smith's tongs and harness for setting tires. You can get tire cut and set at Laramie but you will frequently have occasion to set them on the road. The most common way is to nail a thin hoop on the felloe or part of its circumference and heat the tire and put it on. Another way is to take off tire, raise or open the felloe, take pieces of good firm sole leather, cut round holes in them, split into the hole, and slip it on to the spoke, and two or three pieces, according to circumstances, between the felloes and put on the tire. I have put on several in this way, which seem to do well. Well made, stout active cattle, of the common kind of scrub stock should only be brought and about four yoke, or three at least for each wagon; and be sure to bring none except such as you work in the teams. All in our company who have loose cattle regret having started with them, and some sold their loose cattle at Laramie. Be careful to get an industrious, careful hand to drive your teams and one that will not leave his post at any time. I would advise to bring no horses. Mules for working or riding do well. Get a good Mexican saddle. A common saddle, whether rode or not, will be of little value, even after coming this far. Bring plenty of good strong rope, five or six hundred feet will not be too much. There is a great deal of windy weather and rains are generally accompanied with high winds. You should, therefore, have your wagon: covers of very strong material. Good bed-ticking is good. Let the wagon bows be strong and well turned; and the _cover should be so fixed as to entirely shelter the hind and front ends of the wagons when necessary.

The wagon bed should be fixed so rain could not drive in on the floor, either at the sides or ends. A good tent is very necessary. Common domestic is not fit for a tent. Tent poles should be ironed and the pins should be made of iron or buck horns. A light cook-stove will be found very convenient to set at the mouth of the tent. Have a stake to hold up the pipe. A small dog or two will be useful till you cross the Missouri river after which they are more than useless. They have caused one company to divid. They have caused Walker and Bristow' s companies' teams to run away twice, and ours once, It is a remarkable thing that teams, especially on the Platte are apt to become frightened very easily and run off. Walker and Bristow's company had 24 teams to run at once, killing some oxen and crippling others, besides other damage. Our company had 19 teams (all except Purvines' 5 wagons) to run. Isaac Ball of St. Charles, Co. Mo, had his thigh broken. He is doing well. It is a frightening sight to see so many teams running. When you stop for dinner or any cause loose the cattle from the wagon. If there is about to be a general runaway turn your oxen from the road and give them a fair start and stick to the wagon; otherwise you will be liable to be run over and wrecked. The cattle will run about 200 yards and stop. Our company consists of 24 wagons, belonging to Hooker and Purvine of Scott and Morgan Counties: Tucker, Holmes, Lewis and Stephen and William Porter of Pike County, Ill. and J. Ball of St. Charles Co., Mo. We organized by selecting John Purvine Captain and William Porter Lieutenant. We divided our company into six messes or divisions, each one takes his turn to lead. We

have divided our men into seven guards or watches, three of which come on each night to guard the cattle and wagons. This division operates equally upon all. We are also into nine divisions to herd the cattle morning and evenings. Every evening we drive our wagons, half to the right and half to the left forming a carel. The form of a horse-shoe makes a good carel. At night bring the mules and horses if any into the carel and the cattle near its mouth and guard them. I thought I would give a particular account of the road to this point but will not have time nor space. Procure Palmers' book and Fremont's map which will be very useful. If you have a man in company who has been the route it will be well; otherwise you ought generally to send some two or three In advance to select camping places. For the first 200 miles you will generally have to camp off the road. Wood is very scarce on Platte till you get near Laramie. Plenty of Buffalo chips on Platte till you cross the south fork which are preferable to green cottonwood. When you have an opportunity of getting good wood on Platte better lay in two or three day's supply. At Scotts Bluffs, lay In one days supply of wood after which it is not necessary to haul wood up to this place. Lay In a few good whip stocks of hickory poles. Let all your nailing about the wagons be with wrought nails. This is the fourth day we have been here waiting to cross the Platte. A small company of Mormons from Salt Lake are here with a small? Boat to cross the immigrants. They charge \$1.50 per wagon. It will be two days yet till we can cross. Yesterday a company of Mormons arrived here with their wagons and teams to assist their friends now on the road to Salt Lake. There is now a company in our camp from Oregon, just arrived. They say grass is very scarce on the route from this on, and it will be very difficult getting there. They came the southern route in consequence of the war with the Indians, some seem to think it very dangerous to go either route. Andrew Rodgers was killed with Dr. Whitmans' family. It is thought the war will be brought to a close this year. You will hear later news before next spring. We have been travelling with Walker and Bristow's Company for some time, but for convenience will separate here till necessity calls us to join again. If thought best, you may have this letter published, and I hope this may suffice for a letter to all whom I promised to write to, and all interested. I promised to write a letter for Samuel Tucker today, but the company is in such hast to leave I shall not have time. He says to tell all his relations and friends that he is well, and all the family have been well and are in good spirits considering the circumstances. Mr. Coffey and wife, together with their family wish to be remembered. Give my regards to all my relations and friends, and tell all who may intend to take this trip to be sure to have a good wagon and team and plenty of provisions. One thing I forgot to mention in its proper place and which I consider of importance; make use of rosin and tallow to grease wagons. Black lead will do "but is very inconvenient to haul. It will black everything. In hopes of seeing you again, I am. William Porter

Note by Mary E. Porter

This letter does not name N. Coffey as one of the men in the train. However William Porter was evidently in contact with him. Perhaps he was in one of Purvine's five wagons, or in Walker's and Bristow's company which was close by.

Scott County is the first county east of Pike and Morgan County the next one, St. Charles Co., Mo. is north of St. Louis but near the area where William Porter grew up. Obviously this "company" was made up in the area around Pittsfield or Detroit and as according to William's diary left from Illinois. Maude Boone's insert at the beginning of the diary about leaving from Independence Missouri could not be correct.

David Porter and his son-in-law, Samuel Sitton, did leave from Independence.