

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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A COVERED WAGON TRIP TO YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK IN 1894

--from the diary of EVA S. BANCROFT

PREFACE- The original diary was donated to the Sutton Historical Society by Lousia (Chase) Waner of Church Street, Sutton. Eva Bancroft is buried in the Howard Cemetery.

In 1894 railroads crisscrossed the country, horseless carriages were being invented, the telephone enabled people to converse simultaneously between distant places and **YET** a family group endured the hardships of wagon travel to view the natural wonders a few hundred miles distant- from Buffalo, Wyoming to Yellowstone National Park

The diary reproduced here is printed word for word as Eva Bancroft penned it daily in ink under adverse conditions while enroute. Her writing style precluded capitals and periods. Her dateline is integrated into text line wise. For the purpose of clarity and readability capitals and periods have been inserted to create sentences. The dateline delineates paragraphs. Daily recording in context is often repetitious but the unexpected mishaps and hardships are documented with a simplicity of words that does compell one to be in spirit to share their arduous trek.

The travel group: EVA BANCROFT (first marriage to a Mr. Humphery who was killed in an Iowa tornado) was father of EDITH and CORA. Second marriage to a Mr. Bancroft, father of EDITH and J. Elmer Bancroft. EDITH married FRED Bates. The diary records: "I" (Eva), THE TWO GIRLS (Louisa and Cora), EDDIE (Edith), and "F" or FRED (Bates).



EVA S. BANCROFT
b. 1830-d. 1903

THE DIARY-

-EDITOR-

August 6 - Started from Buffalo for the Park. Went one mile broke down and had to stay at a house where 2 men lived alone. Stayed to 5 o'clock next day when Fred went back to town to have wheel fixed. Cost \$4.

August 7 - We started again. Went to Piney Creek that night and got there just after dark. Got supper then I put up the tent and the girls and I went to bed in the tent and Fred & Edith in the wagon. All slept well.

August 8 - Got up this morning and got breakfast. Expect to start soon for the next place. Piney is near Fort Phil Carney where in 1867 there was a fight with the Indians. The Fort is abandoned now.

August 9 - Camped on the prairie between Big Horn and Becton. At noon had dinner at Wolf Creek. At night we camped at Datorn on the Toring River. Made 25 miles today. One of the wheels came off today. One of nuts came off. It delayed us half-an-hour. No one hurt. Our team is not a very good one for so long a trip and such bad roads. 60 miles miles from Buffalo.

August 10 - Leave Toring River this morning. Got to the Reservation today. Dinner on Reservation. Camped on the same for the night.

August 11 - 80 miles from Buffalo. Start this morning for Little Horn River. Camped on Lodge Grass Creek on the Reservation.

August 12 - We visted the Custer battle ground. There is a large monument for General Custer and his soldiers. They were killed the 25th and 26th of June 1876. Only one man got away alive. There were between 2 and 3 hundred. The spot where General Custer fell is marked with a large cross. At night we camped about 3 miles from Fort Custer.

August 13 - Started for Fort Custer and past thru the Fort about 10 o'clock. We forded the Little Horn River 8 times on our way to Custer. Today we crossed the Big Horn on a pontoon bridge. I never saw one before. It is made of a string of boats clear across the river. We drove just like any bridge. One dollar toll. Drove a little way and then had dinner. We washed and the girls went in bathing. We saw agreat many Indians yesterday of the Crow Tribe. They are a dirty set but peaceable. Saw 2 or 3 squaws with white husbands. At night camped near the Fort and in the night an Indian came to the camp. He wanted some coffee but did not get it.

August 14 - Started again rode to about one o'clock then stopped for dinner. Fred shot a sage hen. We had some of it for dinner and the rest for supper at night. We camped on the Reservation again.

August 15 - Started early this morning. Rode 15 miles but could not find water sooner. Then we camped near a little stream and got dinner. We drove all day without seeing anybody yesterday except 2 Indians and did not see anyone all day today. At night camped on the Reservation miles from anywhere.

August 16 - Getting reading to start for the next place. At noon camped on the REservation. Got dinner and stayed awhile and rested. We have had bad roads today. Tonight we are camped near another party and some Indians came to see us. Fred shot 2 hens so we shall have some for supper. Had the worst roads today that we have had yet.

August 17 - We camped about 5 miles from Prior Creek. There is a man and his wife camped near us. The first white people that we have seen for 2 days. Started for Prior Creek crossed this forenoon. We are near a ranch the first we have seen for some time. We have got off the Reservation and am glad for I got tired seeing Indians but I find we have not got rid of them yet. Near a river that is called Charles Fork last night and it is settled all around here with Indians. Had not got our fire made before they began to come. Two of them came up to me and and said "How Do" and put out their hands to shake and I shook. They said, "Heap Good" and went off into the evening. They had a dance but the river was between us and I was glad of it. Such a noise as they made 'til midnight. They had tom toms and the dogs barked and the squaws sang and such a noise I never heard but they did not trouble us any other way. We are still a 100 miles from the park and awful roads ahead of us.

August 18 - Start again this morning and hope for good luck. At noon we camped at Rocky Creek and all went fishing. I caught one trout and Fred caught one. The girls did not get any Edie said she caught one but did not land him. At night we camped near a sheep ranch where there are 2 thousands sheep. Went to see them after they were in the pen. There is a man and a dog with him and take care of them. It is miles from anybody. A pretty lonesome life I think.

August 19 - We got breakfast and then Edith did some washing. We shall stay here until towards night. It is too hot to drive in the middle of the day today. At night we camped near another sheep ranch near the Yellowstone River.

August 20 - Started again at noon. Camped near a little stream and got dinner. We have had terrible roads. Today it is a hard way to go to the Park. Hope we shall not be disappointed when we get there. We crossed Still Water twice this afternoon. It was up to the horses bellies and very swift but we went through alright but we got on the wrong road and rode all the afternoon no road at all. We had some awful places to go over. Fred killed a rattlesnake today.

August 21 - Hope we shall have better luck today. Camped near a ranch at noon. Got some eggs and milk which was a change for we had biscuits and bacon 'til I was tired of it. At night we camped near the Yellowstone River and near the North Pacific Railroad.

August 22 - Camped near a place called Big Timber. The girls tried to get some eggs but could not so it will have to be biscuits and bacon again. At night we camped about 5 miles from Big Timber.

August 23 - Camped about 5 miles from Livingston near the railroad.

August 24 - Came to Livingston this forenoon. Stopped and got what provisions we need to take us through the Park. It is a very pretty place. Wish I lived here instead of Buffalo. We shall soon get into the mountains now but we are 60 miles from the Park yet.

August 25 - I have lost one day. Started again this morning. I have not been well for a day or two. Camped near a small stream. I could not eat so laid down on the ground while the others got dinner. Getting ready to start again. Feel rested so think I can stand it to go on. It is terrible hot at night. We camped right on the bank of a very rapid stream and I did my washing before I went to bed.

August 26 - Getting ready to start again. Hope to get to Cinnabar tonight but have my doubts. Did not get far today. Had awful roads today. Camped near the river for dinner then started again at one of the worst hills to climb in this part of the country.

August 27 - Ten miles from Cinnabar and hope to get there today. Getting started again. Last night we camped near Yellowstone River. We one side and the railroad on the other right between the mountains. In the afternoon we got to the Yellowstone Park. At night we camped about a mile from Fort Yellowstone. In the evening 4 soldiers came to our camp to see us. Stayed all the evening. Very pleasant young men. Went to see the mammoth Hot Springs before we went into camp. Great sight, grand beyond my power to describe.

August 28 - Edith is getting dinner after which we are going to the next place. Left camp about 3:30 p.m. rode about 4 miles to the Golden Gate.

(Unfortunately, missing from the original diary is one page documenting their visit while at the Yellowstone Park. However the last of part one mentions the arrival and the first part of two just before departing the Park will be printed in the next BULLETIN in about one month.)

MONTHLY MEETINGS-

DECEMBER - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall with thirty-six members present. Newly elected President, Malcolm Pearson, presided. Bud Gurney reported on the eventual acquisition by the Society of the Eight Lots School House from the Eight Lots School House Association. Being the annual Christmas auction meeting, acting auctioneers Mary Arakelian and Daniel Griffith duly officiated. One hundred and eighty dollars was raised. Mary King's committee served refreshments.

JANUARY - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall with nineteen members present. A motion was voted to forward a letter to Barbara Weaver expressing appreciation for her services as Recording Secretary whose resignation was regretfully accepted after serving from October 7, 1985 until November 7, 1989. A bequest of two thousand dollars was received from the estate of Emily Bullock was announced. A general discussion concerning By-Laws concluded with the decision to post them at our meeting places. William Carter of Douglas explained the historical production methods of brick laying in New England. He described the different styles of designs with slide graphics. He also detailed his activities in bluebird repopulation efforts. Refreshments were served.

FEBRUARY - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall with twenty-one present. It was voted to write a letter of gratitude to past President, Daniel Griffith (absent because of illness) for his services. The speaker was stamp collector, Ronald Goodrich presenting historical information on United States stamps. Reference was made that the first stamps were issued in 1840 and the first post office was a Boston tavern. Mary King's committee served refreshments.

MARCH - The Society met at the General Rufus Putnam Hall with President, Malcolm Pearson presiding. Twenty-two persons attended. Past President, Daniel Griffith, was presented a certificate of appreciation and a pen and pencil set for his services from 1985 to 1989. It was voted to hold the April meeting at the Manchaug Church. Also it was voted to forward a check to Phillip Whitney as the Society's share for his ice cutting demonstration on Manchaug Pond in January. Bud Gurney reported plans to move a barn to the Waters Farm is in progress. The flea market date was set for July 7th. Guest speaker Russell Cohen, Coordinator for the Blackstone River Waterway Division spoke on projects for the restoration of the river corridor. Slides illustrated his talk. Refreshments were served.

APRIL - The Society met at the Manchaug Church. A report of the Directors' Meeting was summarized concerning the Blacksmith Shop roof, painting the Manchaug Church ceiling, minor repairs at the General Rufus Putnam Hall. Discussion ensued about the Eight Lots School House whose exterior needs painting. A vote of intention to acquire the Eight Lots School House from the Association if they so desire was approved. The Society is presently holding a repair fund for the school in the memory of Phyllis MacLaren. William Hultgren of the Charlton Historical Society illustrated with slides the restoration of the Rider Tavern on North Side Turnpike in Charlton. Both Societies will meet May 5 to view stenciling in the Waters and Stevens houses in West Sutton and the Rider Tavern in Charlton. Mary King's committee served refreshments.

MAY - The Society met at the West Sutton Baptist Church in cooperation with the North-Bridge and Millbury Societies. One hundred and eighty-nine persons attended the presentation by Jack Swedburg, an internationally known wildlife photographer. His program featured wild life in Alaska, the oil production in Pudhoe Bay and the pipeline to Valdez. The second part of the program was the Valdez oil spill which was vividly slide documented. The combined Societies provided refreshments.



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