



## ALONG THE OREGON TRAIL

Mark Hattan, with his bride of six days - Martha, together with his sister, Jane Hattan Baxter, and Horace Baker left Illinois in April 1845 to join the great wagon train from Missouri to Oregon. Arriving after the emigration had departed, they wintered in Missouri where Martha gave birth to a daughter, Mary Jane, April 18, 1846.

The following article, titled "UNCLE MARK HATTON" [corrected spelling is Hattan] appeared in the *Oregon City Courier* newspaper dated October 25, 1907:

'Uncle Mark' Hattan, as he is affectionately called by relatives and friends, was born in Rockbridge County) Virginia in 1821. At age 9, he, with his family, moved to Brown County, Ohio, where they lived five years. They next moved to what is now Marshall County, Illinois. He lived there ten years, or until 1845.

He was at this time 24 years of age, and (to use his own expression) 'he saw a girl he liked, married her, loaded her into the wagon and started for Oregon'. They married the 16th of April and started west just six days after. When they arrived at the rendezvous in Jackson County, Missouri, the emigrant train had already departed so they were compelled to wait until the next year. By May 1846, fifty wagons, averaging six persons to the wagon, had gathered together and on May 7, the start for the new country was made.

When they reached the Missouri, the roads forked, one being the Santa Fe Trail, the other leading to the north. They followed the north road up Blue River to the Platte and on to Ash Hollow. From here they struck up to Fort Kearney. This was a small trading post, with one blockhouse. Before they reached this place, they met a band of between 3,000 and 4,000 Indians drawn up in a line across the road. The train stopped. This was their first encounter with the Indians though they had been traveling through Indian country for many days.

Imagine the situation if you can! More than 3,000 Indians, as fine specimens of Indian manhood as could be found, sitting their horses, impassive, yet probably ready to fight at little provocation. Fortunately, a peaceful arrangement was made.

A committee of whites met a delegation of the Indians, and after a short 'talk', blankets were spread on the ground and from each wagon stores were placed upon them. More and yet more was demanded. At last, at a sign from the chief, the lines parted, the wagons passed through, and a long breath of relief passed the lips of many.

It was about this time that Mr. Hattan's team ran away one night, and the search for them caused several days' delay. They were found in a hollow in the hills. During the search, the party camped over night with Fremont\*, who was then out on his famous expedition.

[Note: \*John Charles Fremont had, in 1838 at age 25, become a second lieutenant in the elite US Topographical Corps, where he gained a brilliant reputation as a wilderness surveyor and map maker. He was later appointed chief of an expedition to map the Oregon Trail. While underway to begin this assignment in 1842, Fremont met the now-famous Indian fighter and scout, Kit Carson, who joined him on three Oregon Trail expeditions.]

The next camp was at Pacific Springs in the Rocky Mountains. Then the Sandy River was crossed. Here the roads forked again, one leading through a desert. They decided to follow the Green River, then they crossed over to Fort Bridger and camped. From there, they went northwest to Bear River, which they followed. Here they came upon Soda Springs. The water was cool, clear, and excellent. 'After nearly sixty years, I can still remember how good the water was. It was splendid for bread, and women baked up supplies', Mr. Hattan says.

Leaving this place, they crossed a wide desert region. At Steamboat Springs, one man - Mr. Newton - was lost; and the train waited two days while a search party hunted for him. He was found safe, for he had crawled into one of the caves or pits of the springs, to keep from the wolves.

They now crossed a spur of the mountains and entered the Oregon Territory. From the hills, they could look down across a level plain to Fort Hall, although it took two days to reach it. Mr. Hattan declares this was the loveliest country he ever saw, without exception.

After leaving Fort Hall, there were several large streams to ford. The Snake River was followed past Raft River, past Goose Creek, up steep mountains and down steeper ones, and on until the three islands of the Snake River were reached. Here they must ford again. The river was about a mile wide but by crossing from one island to another, they would have no trouble.

There was a narrow bar between islands - wide enough for the wagon - and on either side, deep water. Mr. Hattan had charge of two wagons, and must wade and lead each team. One was taken over and he came back and started with the other. 'It was a pretty good wade', Mr. Hattan says. The water was running into his vest pockets when his strength gave out. His presence-of-mind did not desert him and he caught an ox by the tail and was drawn to shore.

Fort Laramie, the next camping place, was a trading post with the usual blockhouse. Many traders were at the post at the time and all classes and nationalities were represented. Here the train rested a day and then prepared to cross the south fork. The wagonbeds were blocked up on the standards and they went through in safety.

Here the divide of the company began. The ones we are following came up the North fork. Here was another dangerous crossing, and again the wagonbeds were blocked up. The stream was swift, and it was necessary to wade and guide the oxen. As Mr. Hattan waded in, the water rose higher and higher. It was up to his shoulders and the current bore him up. His wife who was in

the wagon, called out "hang on to the ox's horn; there's no danger", this he did, and the ox carried him out safely. No thought of danger or drowning had entered his mind.

They now found a half-mile stretch of quicksand, and the lumbering cattle were rushed across it to prevent their sinking in the sand. They had entered the sweetwater country and begun to see evidences of nature's fanciful work. They had struck the soap-holes - wells of moist clay dirt. Now there was danger to both cattle and men. One ox belonging to Mr. Hattan fell into one of the pits. He was brought out safe and sound 'but that dirt didn't come off till we reached Oregon'.

When they reached Independence Rock, most of the party explored it and wrote their names high up on its side. If any trace is to be seen of them after nearly 60 years, Mark Hattan's name is among the rest.

The men took turns leading the train. The day after leaving the rock it fell to Mr. Hattan to lead. For the full day they traveled through a herd of buffalo. It was probably the most thrilling episode of the trip. Fifteen miles passed without danger.

Then something frightened some of them and the pawing and scraping and bellowing of angry bulls began. The horns were tossing all about the wagons. One buffalo came toward the lead team, but a blow on the head with the butt-end of a rifle made it circle around. Then one jumped over the tongue, between the team and the wagon. 'Well, I thought we were goners that time but no more took fright, and we went through all right', Mr. Hattan says.

The next day was Sunday. They traveled until noon and then were obliged to stop on account of the serious illness of one of the young women in the train. It was thought she could not possibly live, but during the afternoon she began to improve and eventually recovered. That evening, a stray buffalo came into camp and was shot. The jerked meat was added to the provisions.

One man - Mr. Turney - had, besides his oxen and wagon, a horse and buggy in which his wife rode. He led the way across the bar with the horse and buggy, while Mrs. Turney and a young boy brought the team. In some way, the horse and buggy went over the side and floated down the river. The oxen tried to follow, but the boy held them back with a chain, before the wagon could go over.

Indians were watching, down the river, and rescued Mr. Turney and his horse. They then rode up to where Mrs. Turney was sitting in the wagon and wished to take the baby whom she held in her lap. When she refused to let them have it, they wanted to take both her and child. She finally made them understand that she preferred to remain where she was and they guided the team across the bar in safety.

Soon after, they reached the Hot Springs. Everyone was thirsty. The water bubbled over the rocks and looked so cool and inviting that the dogs rushed up to drink. They soon discovered that appearances often deceive. Here they cooked their rice and meat without building fires.

They camped several times along the Boise River, and at Fort Boise, another of the Hudson Bay Company's fur-trading stations, they crossed the river again. Here they struck the Malheur River then on to Burnt River, which they followed to the Grande Ronde Valley.

One young man in the train had jokingly bargained to sell one of the young women to an Indian chief. When they reached the Grande Ronde Village, the chief was there with his payment of thirty splendid Indian horses. He was accompanied by a large force of young men. Of course the girl was hidden away and the man who had brought this new danger upon them also disappeared till the danger was over. Trouble was expected, but the Indians were finally induced to leave.

It was now late in the fall. The Blue Mountains were crossed, Pendleton was passed, the Umatilla forded and then the John Day. Mr. Hattan says: 'one day after we crossed the John Day, some Indians came up and one lassoed one of my loose oxen. Well, I took my whip and signed him to take the rope off, or I'd whip him. He did, and they rode off. That is as near as I ever came to having trouble with the Indians. At the Deschutes, I hired one to lead my team over while I sat in the wagon. That was the only river along the whole route that I didn't ford.

Now the roads forked again, one going to The Dalles, the other being known as Barlow's Road. The latter was chosen. 'Oh, there were some mighty hills on that road! Some of the steepest hills I ever saw'.

We met Barlow and Foster with a charter for a toll road. They were going to charge us \$3.00 for each wagon and a dollar a head for loose stock. Well, ten dollars was all the money I had in the world. I didn't know where I was going, and I didn't want to give up that ten dollars very bad. I told them I'd pay but I did not want to do it there. Well, they insisted, and said they would take it out of the wagon. If you do, I'll put a bullet through you [said Hattan]. Well they said so much that I finally paid them five dollars, and we came on'.

When the emigrants reached Laurel Hill, Mr. Hattan was in the lead. Part way down the hill was a tree, around which the road made an abrupt turn. As those who have ridden down Laurel Hill know, the descent is very steep. Some previous traveler had started down the grade and the oxen, losing control of themselves, had gone one on each side of the tree, and swinging around in the yoke; had broken their necks. The wreck was still to be seen.

Many of the emigrants; in addition to locking the wheels, felled trees and chained them to the wagons to make the descent less dangerous. "... (we) chained the wheels, and started, and, well", says Mr. Hattan "I just kept going. It didn't take us long to come down."

When the bottom was reached he heard that someone at the top had broken a wagon tongue and he started back to help. After traveling a long time, he made up his mind that he could not get back to the top before dark so returned to his wagon to camp until the rest came down.

At the foot of Laurel Hill, they came upon an emigrant wagon, which was out of provisions. They put in as much food as they could spare, and went on. When they reached Jackknife (Eagle Creek], most of the band separated. Mr. Hattan, with his sister, kept on toward the Clackamas, which they reached October 10, having been almost one hundred and sixty days on the road.

Mr. Hattan enjoys telling how his sister and a Mrs. Briggs were cured of leaving the wagons. They had riding horses and were fond of going alone, often on different trails from the rest. One day in the mountains, where the road wound around a bluff, the women took a shortcut over the

hill. They were completely out of sight and hearing of the wagon train when they came upon a band of Indians in war paint and feathers. They were frightened, of course, but women of those times kept their heads even in moments of danger. Jane made them understand that there was a large train nearby, and finally the Indians allowed them to go, after taking their bonnets which, being bright, had taken the fancy of one of the chiefs. When the Indians passed by the wagons, Mr. Biggs recognized his wife's bonnet on one of the warriors. He supposed his wife had either been captured or killed. When she appeared, his relief can be imagined, though his only remark was 'what the hell, Orilla, have you done with your bonnet?' From that time on, the two women stayed as near the cavalcade as they conveniently could, and seemed to have lost all desire to travel by other than the beaten paths.

In 1847 'Uncle Mark' took up the claim where his home now is; living on a rented farm until 1848, when he built a log cabin and moved to his homestead, and began to 'carve out a home from the wilderness.' In May 1848, he had the misfortune to lose his wife, who had suffered from consumption for some time.

In 1861, he married Mary Emily Wills, herself a pioneer of 1853. Her life, too, had been full of the dangers and excitements incident to a pioneer life, and they were well fitted for the long and useful life which lay before them. Ten children were born to that marriage."

\*\*\*\*\*

Mark's sister, Jane, married Morris Baxter in Marshall County, Illinois. A son, Carlin, was born in 1839; daughter Julia in 1840; and - as Hattan family legend tells it - about the time daughter Mary Lucinda was born in April 1843. 'Morris, with a considerable sum of money on his person, mysteriously and unexpectedly disappeared, and it is supposed that he was murdered by the bandits of the prairies.'

In 1845, Jane left her three children in the care of her parents, Forsythe and Mary Hattan, and joined her brother's entourage. Though nothing is known of the demise of his first wife, Horace's probate records indicate that he had four children whose ages ranged from 4 to 14 when he came to Oregon.

Horace and Jane entered into an agreement in the state of Illinois, to live together as man and wife. As such, they took claim to 640 acres of Oregon land, but Jane's claim was denied until after they were legally married in 1852.

Jane never saw her son again! Carlin enlisted in the 4th Illinois volunteer cavalry during the civil war and died in 1862 following the battle of Pittsburg landing in Tennessee. Jane's daughter Julia, married Joseph Luther Mumpower in Illinois in 1857, and together with their five children, they moved to (Carver) Oregon in 1882. Jane went to Illinois in 1883 to visit daughter Mary. Horace's two daughters and one son resided in Ohio, while his other son settled in Benton County, Oregon.

Horace and Jane's unique cantilever log home, 'BAKER CABIN' built in 1856 (at Hattan and Gronlund Roads, Carver), was added to the 'National Register of Historic Places' in 1976.