

"This Far Off Land": The Overland Diary, June-October, 1867, and California Diary, January-March, 1868, of Elizabeth "Bettie" Duncan

by Katie H. Armitage

Introduction

When the company of thirteen, made up of men, women and children, set out from Lawrence, Kansas, for California on June 24, 1867, the lure of the West had, during the preceding quarter of a century, drawn already more than a quarter of a million people onto the Overland Trail. A leader of the 1867 Lawrence party, Wesley Harvey Duncan, had been part of this earlier migration. During the gold rush to California in the 1850s, Duncan had operated a miner's store for a short time in California. After his first wife died, he returned to Missouri where, in 1854, he married the young Elizabeth Watts. In the next year the family moved to the fledgling city of Lawrence, Kansas.

Although he had established himself as a successful businessman during the tumultuous first decade of Lawrence settlement, Wesley Duncan by the mid-1860s again looked westward for the future.¹ At the time of the 1867 overland journey the Duncan family included Wesley, age fifty-two; his wife Elizabeth, known as Bettie, age twenty-nine; William T. "Willie" Duncan, the twenty-year-old son of Wesley's first marriage; and two of Wesley and Bettie's children, Katie, who turned six en route, and Cettie, age four.

Bettie Duncan began a travel diary as the Lawrence party left home for the four-month overland journey in the summer of 1867. She also kept a two-month diary



This photograph of Elizabeth and Wesley Harvey Duncan is believed to be their 1854 wedding portrait. In 1867 the Duncan family left a comfortable life in Lawrence for unknown fortunes in California.

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1. "Wesley Harvey Duncan," *United States Biographical Dictionary, Kansas Volume* (Chicago: S. Lewis and Co., 1879), 629-30.

while in San Jose, California, in 1868. These two diaries² record a period of trail travel that is not as well documented as the earlier years of the overland migration.

In a study of one hundred women's records of the Overland Trail, historian Lillian Schlissel listed only one

2. The original Duncan diaries of 1867 and 1868, as well as a complete diary for 1864, are in the Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas. The 1864 diary was signed "Bettie" and this familiar form of Elizabeth will be used in this article although public records list her name as Elizabeth Duncan.

diary from 1867 and one from 1866, all of the remainder were from earlier years. In an introduction to her study Schlissel wrote:

Over eight hundred diaries and day journals kept by those who made the overland journey have been published or catalogued in archives, and many more are still in family collections.³

In the past decade scholars have reexamined these documents and produced new interpretations of the overland experience. Notable among the new studies are John D. Unruh's *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860*, John Mack Faragher's *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, and Schlissel's *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*. Additionally, historians Julie Roy Jeffrey and Sandra L. Myres have made extensive use of women's trail diaries for studies of women in the West.

Despite this renewed historical scrutiny of the trail, a number of primary records have yet to be examined. Among diaries that have not been analyzed are the travel and California diaries of Elizabeth "Bettie" Duncan. This article will follow the 1867 journey of the Lawrence party, compare the experiences of Bettie Duncan with similar experiences of other women on the trail, and assess the impact of the overland journey and California sojourn on the Duncan family, in particular, and on other husbands and wives who made the journey, in general.

Bettie's initial entry in the travel diary indicated that she, as many women facing the hardships and hazards of the two-thousand mile journey, was reluctant to leave home,

Monday, June 24, 1867.

The dreaded day has at last come. We are now in camp the rest are eating dinner while I write but my heart is to[o] full of thoughts of loved ones that I have now left behind. O how strong are the cords of love that bind one to those I leave with such deep feeling but I must and will brace up and fare the best I can.

Public notice of the departing party appeared in Lawrence's *Kansas Daily Tribune* on June 25, 1867, in a column on "Local Matters."⁴

A party of our citizens started yesterday for California, a portion, we believe, for permanent residence, and others with the intention of returning at some future day. The following names comprise the party: Mr. Duncan, wife,

son, and two children; G. W. Berry and wife; G. W. McGrew, wife and child; Charles Babcock, Mr. Johnson and Mr. A. A. Thorpe.

They intend going the overland route.

The motivations behind this journey so late in the active years of trail use can only be surmised. The economic or personal reasons for the westward trek by the three families and three single men probably varied. Wesley Duncan was clearly the most prosperous of the party. The Kansas State Agricultural Census of 1865 valued his real estate at \$18,000 and personal estate at \$20,000; George W. Berry, a cabinetmaker, was listed with estates at \$5,000 and \$300; G. W. McGrew, a nurseryman, listed values of \$1,200 and \$500. Of the other three men in the party, only A. A. Thorpe was found in the 1865 census. At age twenty-one, he lived in his parental home and listed no estate.⁵

The 1867 journey apparently occasioned the sale of the Duncans' comfortable Lawrence home, now the site of the Watkins Community Museum, 1047 Massachusetts; by 1868, A. W. Wilder paid taxes on this property.⁶ Leaving this home must have been a wrenching experience for Bettie Duncan. Her daily life followed a regular pattern of work in the house, visits to the homes of neighbors, and worship in the nearby First Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Duncans' life in their earliest years in Lawrence had been more typical of the pioneer experience. They first lived in a log cabin and later above their store. By the time of the California trip their circumstances had materially improved.⁷

The home from which they left was spared the devastation wrought upon much of Lawrence during Quantrill's raid of August 21, 1863. In a publication on the fiftieth anniversary of the raid, Duncan's daughter wrote that the raiders came to her parents' home demanding to be led to the store. Wesley Duncan's life was spared but the store was destroyed.⁸ Duncan's partner, Duncan Allison, who happened to be spending

5. Kansas State Agricultural Census, 1865, Douglas County, City of Lawrence, 14, 36, 45, Lawrence Public Library.

6. Douglas County Tax Records show the value of Lot 113 at \$1,500, Lot 115, \$1,000, indicating a substantial house. Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library. This house apparently was torn down before it was decided to construct on the site the Watkins Bank, which was built in 1887.

7. Katie H. Armitage, "Elizabeth 'Bettie' Duncan: Diary of Daily Life, 1864," *Kansas History* 10 (Winter, 1987-88): 279.

8. *Lawrence Today and Yesterday* (Lawrence: *Lawrence Journal World*, 1913), 126. Bettie, later Mrs. N. O. Stevens, placed the home on the site of the Watkins Bank, now the Elizabeth M. Watkins Community Museum, and said, "We lost the store and the stock, and \$8,000.00 in gold."

3. Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 11. Schlissel's tables following page 231 show the year of ninety-six diaries.

4. *Kansas Daily Tribune*, Lawrence, June 25, 1867.

the night in the store, was killed. The business was soon reopened with a new partnership. On October 1, 1863, the *Kansas State Journal* of Lawrence reported the rebuilding of Lawrence: "In Miller's new block which will soon be completed the Messrs. Duncan & Morrow will continue the business of Duncan & Alison [sic]."⁹ By November 1865, however, Morrow, with a new partner named Lewis, advertised goods at 71 Massachusetts Street.¹⁰ How and why this change occurred was only alluded to in a later biographical sketch of Duncan: "Selling out, he devoted himself to the settlement of his business and collection of accounts..."¹¹

Whatever the reasons for Duncan to sell his business and home and set out for California, the late 1860s seemed to have been a particularly hazardous time to travel. Indian attacks on parties on the trail escalated as post-Civil War frontier settlements pushed farther into the traditional hunting ground of the Plains Indians and the advance of the Union Pacific Railway brought many more competing hunters and settlers onto the plains. The prospective travelers certainly must have been aware of the dangers, if not of the pressures underlying the Indian attacks. The *Kansas Daily Tribune* of April 7, 1867, editorialized on "Indian Outrages."

Every mail coach and freighter that comes from the west, reports additional Indian outrages. Not only are single individuals and small parties murdered but entire trains, and companies, and forts, are butchered by the wholesale. One massacre after another follows so closely, that it has become a subject for only passing remark.

The writer concluded, "We don't profess to be of a blood-thirsty disposition, but we do hope that every infernal red-skin of the plains may be sent to eternal happiness before the summer is over."¹² Although the

attacks prompting this outburst were at forts north of the Overland Trail route, the Lawrence travelers must have been reminded of the dangers of the journey only two months before they were to leave. However, as historian Schlissel observed of the determination of the emigrants: "Ignorance of the road had not stopped them in the 1840s; cholera had not stopped them in the 1850s, and neither Civil War nor Indians would stop them now."¹³

The Overland Trail, 1867

As Bettie Duncan began her travel diary on the day of departure, neither her possible fears regarding the journey nor preparations for travel were recorded. Many other travel diaries also began at departure, but Bettie Duncan's record is unusual for three reasons: the year in which it was written; the Lawrence origins of the party; and the fact that these emigrants were not seeking new land in the West as most earlier emigrants had been. The lone 1867 diary in Schlissel's study was an account of travel over the southern route, not the Great Platte River route followed by the Duncans and thousands of earlier overlanders. Few diaries of any route were kept after 1867 for as Schlissel observed: "Migration dwindled after 1868. The railroad began to replace the wagon..."¹⁴

The 1867 Lawrence party was distinct on other accounts. None of the men were farmers. John Mack Faragher found that over half the emigrants he analyzed were farmers and only nine percent were merchants. Faragher also found that over half the overland parties were organized through kinship.¹⁵ Members of the 1867 Lawrence party, although surely well acquainted, were not known to be related by blood or marriage. The Duncan and McGrew homes in Lawrence were two blocks apart and the Duncans and Berrys were associated with the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Lawrence from its time of organization.¹⁶ In the small city these families must have known each other well.

Despite the atypical composition of the Lawrence party of 1867, Bettie Duncan's experiences on the trail were representative of those of many other women traveling overland. As Schlissel observed:

9. The offices of the *Kansas State Journal* were destroyed in the raid and this issue, smaller than the former paper, was printed in Topeka. Later the paper reappeared in Lawrence in full size. *Kansas State Journal*, Lawrence, October 1, 1863.

10. *Kansas State Journal*, May 18, June 4, July 20, 1865; for Morrow and Lewis see November 11, 1865, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library. This collection has scattered copies of the paper for 1865 as does the Kansas State Historical Society.

11. *U.S. Biographical Dictionary*, Kansas Volume, 630. This brief account of Duncan's life gives 1868 as the year of the overland journey, but other evidence, Bettie Duncan's diaries and the newspaper account, make clear that 1867 was the year of departure; 1868 was the year of return to Lawrence.

12. *Kansas Daily Tribune*, April 7, 1867. The writer referred to the Fetterman Massacre, December 21, 1866, in the foothills of the Little Big Horn, 236 miles north of Fort Laramie and to Sioux attacks on Fort Buford in Dakota Territory. For information on the Indian unrest see Dee Brown, *Fort Phil Kearny: An American Saga* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962), 11-13; Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973), 122.

13. Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 130.

14. *Ibid.*, 144.

15. John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 33, 189.

16. Wesley Duncan's home address was given as the west side of Massachusetts Street between Berkeley (10th Street) and Quincy (11th Street) and G. W. McGrew's was Park, Lot 26, and Lee (13th Street). *The Lawrence City Directory and Business Guide for 1866* (Lawrence: Boughton and McAllister, 1866), 45, 63.



This 1867 view of Lawrence's Massachusetts Street provides a glimpse of the town the Duncans chose to leave.

The diaries of the women who went overland in the 1860s show how remarkably little had changed in the life of the road. . . . For most emigrants, life and death still hung in a precarious balance.¹⁷

For the Duncans the "precarious balance" of life tipped to tragedy when their six-year-old daughter, Katie, died en route and was buried on the trail. Young children on the trail were at considerable risk whenever they traveled.¹⁸

One major difference in life on the trail in the later years, including 1867, was the number of amenities travelers could take advantage of at stops along the way. John D. Unruh emphasized the changing nature of the trail in his study of the early decades.

Overland travel was radically altered by the Mormon hegira to the Salt Lake Valley, by the advent of profit-seeking merchants and entrepreneurs, and by the gradual extension of government services westward to the Pacific.¹⁹

Four days of the four-month journey of the Lawrence party of 1867 were spent in the vicinity of Salt Lake City. In this area they enjoyed fresh fruits and vegetables, visited the warm-springs bathhouses and received mail from home. Bettie Duncan and Mrs. McGrew enthusiastically visited the sights in the Mormon capital. They climbed twelve flights of stairs at the Tabernacle wall

17. Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 130.

18. *Ibid.* Tables following p. 231, show death of eleven children, twenty-two men, and six women in the years 1845-1867.

19. John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 380.



Of crossing the Red Vermillion River, northwest of present-day Rossville, Kansas, and near the Louis Vieux Cemetery, Bettie wrote, "came to red Vermillion had a dreadful time crossing the bridge being washed out."

and passed by Mormon leader Brigham Young's residence.²⁰

Another change in life on the trail for emigrants in the late 1860s was the alteration in the natural landscape caused by the westward thrust of the Union Pacific Railway. The Lawrence party followed the tracks north and west from Topeka all the way across Nebraska (newly admitted to statehood in March 1867). The appearance of occasional trains on those tracks jarred the emigrants' perceptions. Bettie marveled at the scene in her diary entry of July 17, 1867.

We have seen two trains of cars coming up and one coming down today it hardly seems possible the cars would [be] running up in this wilderness

When these travelers reached the end of the tracks in Julesburg, Colorado, on July 31, Bettie clearly appreciated the promise the railroad afforded for reunion with family and home:

they are putting down the ties very fast at 3 miles a day I trust they will hurry on as fast as possible for when it is done I will go back to dear old Lawrence

Since longing for friends at home was a constant theme in the diary, railroad tracks were a comforting if disconcerting presence during the first half of the journey.

Another physical change that made overland travel faster in the later years was the bridging of some rivers. The Lawrence party crossed the Kansas River in Topeka easily on June 26 via the bridge that replaced an earlier ferry.²¹

20. Bettie Duncan, September 4, 1867.

21. The precise location of the ferry and bridge is not known, but it was near the present bridge, First and Topeka Avenue in downtown Topeka.



The travelers found that the landscape of western Wyoming differed greatly from the rolling terrain found in eastern Kansas.

6 o'clock in the evening have just drove into camp for the night We left Topeka this morning at nine o'clock crossed the bridge and have been right up the railroad tracks all the day it is a lovely country the Potawatamy [Pottawatomie] lands I believe we had a rain last night but the traveling has been fine all day I forgot to say that we took dinner at Silver Lake today three years ago today I was at the same place with Bro and Sister Dennis²² how many changes then but such is life

Trail improvements could not always be counted upon to stay in place, as was indicated in Bettie's account of the fourth day on the trail, Thursday, June 27, 1867.

We left camp this morning at 6 o'clock passed St. Mary's Mission about ten o'clock this morning came onto coon Creek for dinner came on to red Vermillion²³ had a dreadful time crossing the bridge being washed away we have traveled 20 miles today and are now in camp on Adams Creek it is now twilight supper over how my mind runs back home. Tonight is prayer meeting how often have I thought of one week ago today when Fred my dear Nephew took me out in the country. What a pleasant time we had but it is with the past

Fred Eggert, near in age to his aunt Bettie Duncan, was a friend and confidant as well as the leader of their Methodist Sunday school class.²⁴ Bettie's thoughts of

22. The Rev. L. B. Dennis, Methodist minister, and his wife, Betsey, were close friends of Bettie Duncan in Lawrence, and she joined them in a wagon trip to Manhattan, Kansas, in June 1864. Bettie Duncan, June 9-21, 1864.

23. The current bridge across the Red Vermillion River near the Louis Vieux Cemetery and the Championship Elm Tree, northwest of Rossville, Kansas, is apparently the site described by Bettie Duncan. Directions to the crossing are found in Gregory M. Franzwa, *The Oregon Trail Revisited* (St. Louis: Patrice Press, 1972), 150-51.

24. Armitage, "Elizabeth 'Bettie' Duncan," 284.

Truly The 29th
 One day of long this morning
 had breakfast in just three
 things put up there also
 showed the children and
 my self all started for the
 beautiful spring the boys
 hold us at our horses and
 after traveling there one mile
 we found it the best well
 find for our work for this
 is the best spring I ever
 saw so nice cold and clean
 running out in a great
 stream out of solid rock
 We have traveled 25 miles
 to day and are now in
 camp on the banks of
 green river which I made

On August 23, Bettie's diary recorded, "We have traveled 25 miles to day and now in camp on the banks of the Green river [in Wyoming]."

friends at home were typical of those of many other women on the trail. "Women's diaries, more than men's, tended to focus on friends at home," stated Julie Roy Jeffrey. "Men did not dwell on absent friends in their journals; women did."²⁵

As did many women on the trail, Bettie also lamented the lack of regular worship services. Jeffrey observed:

Familiar patterns disintegrated under the trip's strain, and even the comforting sense of the flow of time vanished. Most striking was the disappearance of the Sabbath, which had become by mid-century a symbol of women's religious and moral authority.²⁶

Bettie carefully noted each Sunday of the four-month journey, even though the Lawrence party traveled on

25. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 37-38.

26. *Ibid.*, 42.

nine of the sixteen Sundays that it was on the trail. After leaving Lawrence on a Monday and traveling six days, the party rested half a day. On Sunday, June 30, 1867, Bettie recorded:

Camped near Marysville We came from black Vermillion today got here at noon and will remain until tomorrow this is quite a dull looking place the stream which is sky blue is beautiful. I am more than home sick today this is our first Sabbath out O how I miss the church the Sabbath School and the loved ones I have so often met there O for grace faith and prayer to guard me on all my undertakings may the Lord keep and bless us all

The next Sunday, July 7, Bettie recognized the necessity of Sabbath travel as she wrote in her diary, "As we are in the country where the Indians are so bad we have traveled all day today." On Sunday July 28, as the travelers rested for the day, Bettie lamented to her diary, "I am deprived of all church privileges," and on September 8, when they again stopped for the day, she recorded:

We have been in camp all day trying to keep Sabbath the best we could but find it pretty hard when there is no church to go to no Sabbath class to meet and so little to clear our mind out for good....

A deeply religious woman, Bettie Duncan observed the Sabbath on her own as she wrote about Sunday, August 11, 1867:

Another Sabbath day has come and gone and still we are away from all the privileges of a Christian people. Did I say all? Not all. Secret prayer and devotion are still left us and amidst all our trial I trust I will ever try to be faithful in this one point if no more

Private devotions, however, did not fulfill the religious or social needs of this faithful communicant of the Methodist faith. The break in congregational life had been formalized by Bettie and two other members of the overland party. Just days prior to departure for the overland journey, Bettie, G. W. Berry, and Charles P. Babcock removed their "letters" from the Methodist Church of Lawrence, according to church records.²⁷

In Lawrence, church worship and activities had formed a major focus of Bettie's life. According to the diary she kept in 1864, her week's activities followed a regular pattern. On Sundays she attended church services and Bible class; on Mondays she and her domes-

tic helper did the family washing; on Tuesdays and Thursdays, she often attended prayer meetings; and on Wednesday afternoons, meetings of the Methodist Ladies Social Circle. Sewing, shopping, and household preparations filled Friday and Saturday. Almost everyday she received visits from friends, and she visited other homes.

Near the end of the four-month journey, on October 18, Bettie recorded a personal milestone, "I am 30 years old today." No celebration marked this occasion. This was in sharp contrast to her birthday observance of 1864 when, despite the war tensions of the time in Lawrence, her nephew and neighbor took her for an outing. She also received presents, though none from her husband, Wesley.

At the time of the 1867 journey, Bettie had been married to Wesley Duncan for twelve years. The union was characterized by tensions accentuated by differences in age, temperament, and interests.²⁸ Wesley and Bettie operated in different "spheres," as the different worlds of men and women were described at the time. Her life centered in her home and church; his focused largely on business and fraternal affairs.

Bettie's weekly routine and social contacts were significantly disrupted by the overland journey. Though their days on the trail kept them in close contact, the work of husband and wife differed in this environment as it had at home. Most men and women traveling overland followed this pattern. Historian Jeffrey has observed that at the beginning of the trip, men drove wagons, hunted, and stood guard while women cared for children, got the meals, and did the family washing.²⁹ Bettie continued familiar tasks, such as washing and cooking, in the unfamiliar circumstances of the trail while Wesley hunted and looked out for the safety of the party. This typical division of labor remained operative for the Duncan party during most of the 1867 journey.

Bettie's care of the children seemed to have been such an accepted part of life that she only incidentally referred to the children in the trail diary. On the second day of the journey, she noted that she had to stop writing as "the little ones want to go to bed," and a few days later she recorded in passing, "I have just got my own little ones bathed and in bed." Later in the journey when illness threatened the lives of the children and of Willie Duncan, her stepson, Bettie's concern about their health dominated the diary entries.

Bettie's compatible relations with her stepson on the trail were in sharp contrast to the distress and pain his

27. Pastor's records, 1863-1869, First Methodist Episcopal Church, Lawrence, Kansas, Manuscripts Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

28. Armitage, "Elizabeth 'Bettie' Duncan," 280.

29. Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 39.

rebelliousness had caused her in 1864.³⁰ On the journey Willie joined Bettie in sightseeing in the mountains and in Salt Lake City. Bettie's travel diary mentioned no difficulty with Willie, who had matured during the time that separates the diaries of 1864 and 1867.

Cooking, like daily child care, was also such an unexceptional part of daily life that it was most often mentioned in the trail diary in connection with other chores. Baking, washing, and other maintenance chores were accomplished when the travelers "laid over" for a few days:

Friday, July 19, 1867

Left camp at 9 drove up to Cottonwood³¹ found it a real pretty little place so clean and neat most all the buildings are made of cedar. There are quite a number of troops there I herd [sic] the music and it made me feel like old times. We drove up four miles beyond Cottonwood and camped for the day. I have been very busy washing baking and cooking all the afternoon. I am very tired tonight but still I remember my class that meets tonight at Lawrence and although I am almost 5 hundred miles from there My heart is with them

Saturday, August 3, 1867

We left camp at 6 traveled 9 miles and came to Pine Bluff and stoped to wash cook and wait for our team I have washed and baked we got some nice currants for pies this is a beautiful place so romantic beautiful pines and cedars we are all going up the bluff tomorrow

Bettie's husband, referred to as "Mr. Duncan" in the travel diary, as well as in her other diaries, appeared in the trail account frequently. After the Lawrence party joined with other travelers to form a group of seventeen wagons at Fort Kearny, Nebraska, Bettie noted that "our men organized this noon and elected Mr Duncan captain."³² He stood guard at night in the area where Indians were perceived to be a threat.

Wesley Duncan frequently fished along the Platte and in mountain streams, he hunted antelope (but no buffalo which were not mentioned in the 1867 diary), and he searched for stray mules. These active pursuits

were typical of many men on the trail.³³ Twice in the diary account Wesley Duncan appeared in an unexpected activity, food preparation. On a cold August morning in the mountains, Wesley and another man "got breakfast" before Bettie and the children arose, and in Salt Lake City, when the women returned to camp after a day of sightseeing, they found "our men had a good dinner or supper which ever it might be called most ready." Bettie continued, "we were very thankful."³⁴ Such thoughtful aid was not unknown in other instances on the trail but as Julie Jeffrey observed of such occasions, "if men helped with female work from time to time, this did not mean they did it regularly."³⁵

Despite ever-present homesickness, Bettie performed traditional female tasks on the trail. She adjusted to the routine and began to enjoy many aspects. After eight days on the trail, she noted on July 2, "I stand the trip so far much better than I expected." After the first month of the journey, Bettie began to accept the challenges of life on the trail and feel comfort in her ability to perform her familiar work at each campsite. She wrote in her diary of July 23, 1867:

We have been traveling all day in the hot broiling sun through sand and dust the thermometer 106 in the shade. I have been more home sick today. I have thought today that it takes more and still [more] patience to endure all the hardships of camp life but not withstanding there is some thing kinda pleasant in this way of traveling I now begin to feel when we get into camp that I am at home and govern myself accordingly

If the heat, dust, and mosquitoes were a tiresome part of trail life, Bettie also found the trail offered some new delights. Her entry of July 26, 1867, written just west of Julesburg, Colorado, chronicled the river crossing and a swim the women took in the river:

Well tonight we are camped on the north side of the South Platte we have ferried over today on a little bit of a boat but got all safe. This side of the river seems much pleasanter than the other. We left part of our train today those that was going to Denver I felt very sorry to leave them Mr Brown family all eat supper with us tonight as there [sic] teams was late getting across. Mrs McGrew, Racha Brown and myself went in the river tonight the water is splendid for bathing

30. In the spring of 1864, Willie had briefly run away from home and had to be retrieved by his father. Willie was later sent away to school in Ohio. Armitage, "Elizabeth 'Bettie' Duncan," 281-82.

31. Cottonwood Springs is near the present Maxwell, Nebraska. Apparently, Bettie was describing "a cedar ranch" built by Charles McDonald about 1860, which featured a deep well. Aubrey L. Haines, *Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail* (Gerald, Mo.: Patrice Press, 1981), 68.

32. Bettie Duncan, July 15, 1867. John Mack Faragher reported that many women addressed their husbands by their surnames in their writing. Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 148. Fort Kearny, established in 1848 in south-central Nebraska, was a major military fort on the Oregon Trail.

33. *Ibid.*, 85. The most popular male pastime was hunting. References to Wesley Duncan's hunting, fishing, and other pursuits appear in the 1867 diary on June 28, July 20, 22, and August 4 and 19.

34. Bettie Duncan, August 9, September 3, 1867.

35. Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 44.



This photograph labeled only as "Duncan baby" may be one of the two Duncan children known to have died in infancy.



Not long before the Duncan family left Lawrence, daughter Katie, then age five, was photographed. A few months later, Katie died on the Overland Trail to California.

Not only was the swim pleasant after dusty days on the road but the social aspect of sharing the experience with the other women and girls was important to Bettie Duncan to whom friendship meant a great deal. In Lawrence she was often in the company of female friends, and on the trail she re-created that circle of friends. Although Mrs. Berry was mentioned in Bettie Duncan's 1864 diary, as was a Mrs. Brown,³⁶ on the trail it was Mrs. McGrew, who also had a child along on the journey, with whom Bettie shared most experiences.

As the Lawrence party neared Salt Lake, the Duncans met residents there whom they had formerly known in Lawrence. This encounter was reassuring to Bettie Duncan as she contemplated a new home in the West. Her diary entry of August 31 recorded:

36. In 1864, Bettie mentioned on July 15th that she went to see "Mrs Brown," however, the newspaper report of the 1867 party did not mention a Brown family. (The identity of this family cannot be determined.) On August 30, 1864, Bettie wrote of being invited "at Mrs Berrys for dinner but could not go as I had company." George W. Berry and wife were listed as members of the 1867 party in the newspaper story on the overland journey.

We left camp at 4 o'clock traveled 4 miles came to Weber river and Webertown. This is a pretty little place O how beautiful it looked to our weary eyes that have seen nothing of the kind. We got some nice potatoes the first we have had we got breakfast and just as we were through breakfast we herd [sic] there was an old acquaintance of ours hired here. Mr D and me went over and found them. They were glad to see us and us them. They left Lawrence 7 years ago there [sic] name are Stevenson they have got rich in this wild country and love it. Yes we can learn to live anywhere if we try they live comfortable. How strange it seemed to see a good house much carpets and furniture again but now we are in much better country than we have been traveling in such a desolate one

Most of Bettie Duncan's reminders of Lawrence were deeply affectionate and filled with longing, but on a special anniversary she recalled a tragic event in Lawrence history. On August 21, 1867, she wrote, "I have had peculiar feelings today 4 years ago today was the Lawrence raid." This reference to Quantrill's 1863 raid on Lawrence, in which more than one hundred fifty men were killed, is one of the most specific recollections



Lucetta "Cettie" Duncan, shown here as a young woman, was four years old when she made the overland journey with her family.



Bessie Duncan, born after the family returned to Lawrence from California, was two years old when her mother, Bettie, died at the age of forty-two.

in the travel diary, and as such, served to demonstrate the continuing impact of that terrible event on those who lived through it.

When Bettie experienced especially pleasurable occasions on the trail, as when she marveled at wondrous sights, she wished to share these with friends at home. In Wyoming on Sunday, August 4, she composed a longer diary entry than usual:

Another Sabbath has dawned and passed how good God is to watch over us and protect us when we are so erring and unfaithful O for more grace and faith. This morning at eight o'clock Mrs McGrew, Racha Brown, Willie, John Brown, Mr Duncan, Katie, little Cettie and myself all went up on Pine bluff. O how beautiful the scenery. We could see one hundred and forty miles with the naked eye. We saw for the first sight of the great Rocky Mountains Longs Peak. We saw plenty of snow on the peaks.

We gathered some beautiful pine cones on the bluff got some pretty cedar and O how much I wished for some loved ones in Lawrence to enjoy the scene with me. O how much I love them. What a large portion of my heart is there everyday I think more and more of

them and everyday the country gets more and more interesting. While we was enjoying the scene we looked down the valley and saw our train coming that we are going to Salt Lake with Mr D hastened down to meet them and prepare us to go with them. We soon followed and found them allmost [sic] ready to go so we had nothing to do but step in the waggons and start we traveled some 6 or 8 miles and camped at a beautiful place on Pole Creek for dinner. Drove 10 miles in the afternoon camped on a good camp ground and are comfortable. Mr Duncan killed another antelope today

Whether the Lawrence party used the telegraph, letters, or some other trailside communication to make these arrangements to meet other wagons is not clear.

On August 5, after some six weeks on the trail, the journey was going well for the Duncans and other members of the Lawrence party. Bettie noted on that date that the weather was "delightful," that no one in their party had been sick, and "all our stock is looking well." The first half of the journey had proceeded smoothly. Even the Indian threat did not materialize. Early in the journey before the party had left "dear old

Kansas," Bettie wrote, "we hear dreadful Indian stories our men keep there [sic] guns in there [sic] hand all the time," and on July 8 she had observed "we passed several ranches today but all of them are deserted on account of the Indians. We keep continually on the watch but have seen no sign of any yet." At Kearney City, Nebraska, the party "herd [sic] some bad Indian reports" and "concluded to wait for more company." During the stay Bettie devoted herself to "baking cooking washing and ironing" and found herself "very tired tonight."³⁷ For the Lawrence party, as for many others, the fear of Indian attacks elicited more anxiety than proved warranted.

To counter anxiety about attacks, the small Lawrence party, at several junctures, met up with other overland travelers to create strength in numbers. On July 6, Bettie observed that "we were waiting for some teams that was coming up to go with us." At Kearney City, the group that joined the party did not please Bettie. She wrote on Saturday, July 13, "I find that the three teams that came up yesterday are Mormons and O what dirty wretches they are I cant see what such people are allowed to live for." This harsh denunciation was often typical of other women when they encountered Mormons on the trail. Julie Roy Jeffrey has found that

Women's cultural values were also revealed when they came into contact with Mormons and Indians during the trip. Unable to see Mormons as the persecuted defenders of religious freedom or Indians as either noble savages or the victims of white civilization, women perceived both as threats to domestic culture. Only when the Indian or Mormon seemed to conform to their own standards did the women have anything positive to say. Thus, they admired Salt Lake City, a stopping-off point for California emigrants, for its beautiful plan, its cozy, snug homes, its prosperous and bustling air.³⁸

Bettie Duncan may be considered an example for Jeffrey's conclusions for Bettie effusively admired Salt Lake City during the stop there in early September. Excited praise filled her diary entry for September 4:

I can hardly compose my mind enough to write tonight. I have seen many things that I hardly know which to speak of first. Well soon after breakfast Mrs. Berry, Mrs. McGrew, Willie, the children and myself all started out to see as much of this wonderful city as we could so the first place we went to [was] the great Tabernacle and temple that is being built. This is a beautiful sight all enclosed by a very high cement wall. Mrs McGrew and myself went upon the very top ascending twelve very

long flights of stairs when upon the top we could see all over the city. What a pretty city with its pretty houses and green trees and running brooks all over the city. When we came down we went to Brigham Young's residence this is not far from the temple [and] is also enclosed by a high stone wall with plenty of fruit trees and curious things us Gentiles³⁹ could not understand. I am very tired tonight and can not write much more

Bettie also marveled at the "strange and beautiful" Salt Lake as the party skirted it on the way west.

Just before the Lawrence party was to begin the desert crossing west of Salt Lake, Bettie noted the illness of her youngest daughter and lamented not being "where I could have the Dr." Until this point the Lawrence party had enjoyed good health. Bettie Duncan herself had evidenced unusually good spirits as she adjusted to life on the trail despite her initial misgivings. In her earlier diary of 1864, she had often mentioned headaches, anxiety and depression,⁴⁰ but during the first half of the overland journey, she did not record these maladies. Everything changed, however, as members of the Duncan family fell ill in mid-September 1867.

Before the Duncans began their desert crossing, Bettie wrote on September 11:

we are going to stay here until tomorrow at 4 o'clock and then start over the Desert how much I do dread it as our darling little Cettie is sick she has not been well for several days and is much worse this evening. O how glad I wo[u]ld be to have her home where I could have the Dr and me take good care of her. I try to trust my God and pray earnestly that he help in this our hour of need

Earlier, while in Wyoming, the Lawrence party had encountered a wagon train in which a sick man had died. Of that incident Bettie wrote that she was awakened by the "moans and screams of the gentleman that was taken sick yesterday." In the next entry she wrote at daybreak, "They came and told us he was dead O how sad it seems to lay him away out here on these dreary mountains not one friend or relative to drop a tear on his grave." The entry continued:

We buried [sic] as best we could which was well considering the circumstances. We left camp about 2 o'clock in the afternoon leaving one behind us and a grave by the road side which on rude board read

In memory of

John Scott died Aug 13 67

37. Bettie Duncan, July 11, 1867.

38. Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 46.

39. Ibid., 153, mentioned Mormon identification with Israelites. Mormon identification with the tribes of Israel led to references to non-Mormons as "Gentiles," a term used here by Bettie Duncan.

40. Armitage, "Elizabeth 'Bettie' Duncan," 275-89 *passim*.

This reporting of the death of a stranger and recording of the legend on the marker was a common phenomenon of women on the trail. As historian Schlissel observed:

The meticulous care the women gave to recording the death toll of the journey remains one of the major sex-related differences between the diaries of women and men on the overland passage. The fact of death loomed large for the women, and they felt death to be a personal catastrophe. Whereas men in their diaries tended to record the cumulative impact of cholera, the women set themselves to note each and every grave they saw.⁴¹

Bettie, like other women on the trail, also recorded passing graves. Earlier, on August 8, Bettie remarked on "the grave of a army man that was killed by Indians May 13th 1863."

She experienced growing anxiety as several members of her own family became ill in September. As Schlissel observed, "No one who reads the diaries of women on the Overland Trail can escape feeling the intensity with which the women regarded loss of life."⁴² Bettie Duncan became the caretaker of the sick and dying in the Lawrence party of 1867. While she cooked and prepared for the night crossing of the desert on September 12, she worried:

my little Cettie was able to be up some but about noon was taken much worse it is 3 o clock in one hour we expect to start for going over the desert we will travel all night and noon or after tomorrow. O how I hate to start with my little lamb so sick but all says it will not hurt her and I must yield as I always have to do O that the Lord will guard and protect my little one and soon make her well

This diary entry illustrated Bettie Duncan's feelings of her own powerlessness; in her words, "I must yield." Because the travelers were some distance from Salt Lake City there was little choice except to go on.

After traveling forty-five miles in sixteen hours, the Lawrence party reached "Fish spring campsite," where Bettie wrote that the child had "flux of the worst kind."⁴³ Another thirty miles at "Deep Creek station" found Bettie lamenting, "I would give anything if I was home

where I could have the Dr and take care of her."⁴⁴ The next day on Monday the 16th, as the child's dysentery continued, the party stayed in camp trying, as Bettie wrote, "to get our little girl better." By this time Willie Duncan, her grown stepson, and others in the party were also ill, but the travelers moved on. On September 18, Bettie wrote "with a heart full of anxiety and a boddy [sic] almost worn out with fatigue," that her husband was "taken with pluresy very bad." On the next day she recorded the continuing travail:

We have traveled 23 miles today I hardly know over what kind of country or anything else. My mind has all been taken up with my sick ones. Willie is very bad also little Katie. Mr Thorp[e] and Mr D are some better. My little Cettie we hope is better but is very sick yet. I myself am almost worn out

Dysentery affected almost everyone on the trail⁴⁵ but only in severe cases was the dehydration effect of this disorder life threatening. Indeed the youngest Duncan child, Cettie, recovered, but the eldest, six-year-old Katie, who also had become ill, did not.

The Death of Katie Duncan

For eight days after September 20, 1867, Bettie Duncan's diary is blank. When she resumed writing on September 28, she charted the course the party took to "diamond Springs Station"⁴⁶ where they camped at the foot of the mountains, "put up our tent took our dear little Katie in made her comfortable as possible but her little spirit was not long for this world." Writing of the death of the child, the mother wrote poignantly, "O the

44. Ibid., September 15, 1867. The Duncan party followed the Overland Stage route across Utah and Nevada. Fish Springs, Deep Creek and Antelope Springs, mentioned in the diary, were shown on the map included in Frank A. Root and William E. Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California* (Topeka: the authors, 1901).

45. Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, observed that virtually everyone suffered some form of dysentery which the emigrants call the "bloody flux." She described the death of a baby from "flux" in the later years of the trail and quoted the mother's belief that "if we had been at home he needn't have died." 130. See references in Schlissel to the "flux" also, 60, 129. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 408, pointed out that "disease was far and away the number one killer" on the trail. Dysentery was probably caused by contaminated water along the trail, and, according to Peter D. Olch, contamination was likely when a "large number of people [camped] at roughly the same locations near water." See Peter D. Olch, "Bleeding, Purging, and Puking in the Southwestern Fur Trade and along the Santa Fe Trail, 1800-1850," in *Adventure on the Santa Fe Trail*, ed. Leo E. Oliva (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1988), 27.

46. Diamond Springs was the name of a station on the Overland Stage road and a Pony Express stop. It is found on an 1867 Nevada map. Helen S. Carlson, *Nevada Place Names, A Geographical Dictionary* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1974), 97. It would appear that the present-day city of Eureka, Nevada, on U.S. Route 50, is in the vicinity of this station site.

41. Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 153-54. Helen Carpenter's 1857 diary mentioned passing the graves of five soldiers killed in 1855. See Sandra L. Myres, ed., *Ho, for California! Women's Overland Diaries from the Huntington Library* (San Marino, Ca.: Huntington Library, 1980), 117.

42. Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 154.

43. Bettie Duncan, September 13, 1867.

agony of our hearts none can ever know how we felt when we sat in that tent with our little angel and herd [sic] the pattering of rain." Bettie continued the account of these sad events and recounted the support and aid rendered by other members of the Lawrence party:

O that God may give us grace to bear the greatest trial of our lives. On Thursday morning [September 25th] Mr McGrew and Henry went up on the mountain side and found a place where there were 2 other little graves and they dug her little grave. Mr Berry and the Frenchman there made a little pine coffin. Mrs McGrew and Mrs Berry dressed her nice and pretty and at 12 o'clock on Thursday we all assembled in and near the tent to listen to Mr McGrew read a chapter and offer a prayer. O how our hearts bled within us. My heart is now to[o] full to write they tell me that it is Gods tender mercy that took my lamb my idol away but I can but feel it is to[o] hard why did he take her here away from home and loved ones there. Friday morning as Mr Duncan and me went to her little grave and there knelt I think if hearts could ever burst with grief our[s] surely would. O that God will give us some help in this our time of need. O for faith and prayer I now feel what little hope I had of being contented in our new home is all gone O for grace and faith

This final sentiment portended the future of the trip and Bettie's response to her California home. A sensitive person who suffered anxiety and depression when she was in her Lawrence home, this tragedy on the trail devastated Bettie Duncan. The death of her eldest child in 1867 also must have recalled her grief at the death of two children ten years before in Lawrence.⁴⁷ Death on the trail was terrible for all mothers, who found it hardest of all the trials to bear. Schlissel described this loss as especially traumatic: "Death along the road was a palpable wound, and it scarred the lives of emigrants who had dared to break so completely with home."⁴⁸

The remainder of Bettie Duncan's 1867 travel diary testified to the scarring that took place from the death of the child on the trail. As she continued the journey chronicle, remarking on "the splendid Silver mines" in Nevada, her feelings of loss were incessant. Bettie recorded her emotions upon being invited to dinner at a ranch along the route:

Sunday, October 6, 1867
they had a splendid dinner fruits and vegetables all brought from California. Today 15 weeks ago is the last meal I eat [sic] at a table until today. How long these

weeks have been and O how full of trial and labor and hardship and sorrow have they been but if my darling could have been spared us I would have been willing to have borne anything that came but O how hard to leave my idol my treasure away in this dreary and lonely land...

At this point near the end of the journey, two members of the original thirteen who had departed from Lawrence on June 24 chose to take advantage of opportunities offered by the silver boom in Nevada.

October 6th

This morning Mr Thorp[e] and Charlie Babcock left us they thought from what they could hear that wages were better at Virginia City Nevada than in California so they left for their [sic] this morning it being 90 miles to that place. We cooked them enough to do them there and they got a good way to go in a large waggon. We feel lonely without them how small our family seems. O little Katie how we miss her

The young men who left the party may have been traveling with the Duncan family to that point in the journey, as unattached persons often joined a family group on the trail. The remaining members of the Lawrence party proceeded west along the Carson River. As the teams approached the Carson bridge, Bettie walked ahead for two or three miles. Pondering the scenes of the falls, she philosophized about life and in her diary entry of October 9 she also noted an unusual sight:

We have traveled about 18 miles and are now in camp in a beautiful place near the river 7 miles from Dayton⁴⁹ we passed the herd of camels and dromedarys today they were feeding on the river bank

The camels Bettie observed must have been transporting mining supplies.⁵⁰ Her matter-of-fact comment on what surely must have been an astonishing sight for a woman from Lawrence contrasted sharply with the emotional language she often used in expressing her own feelings.

Sadness prevailed in the remaining travel diary entries as Bettie charted the last part of the journey. On October 12 she commented on the capital city of

49. One of the oldest settlements in Nevada, Dayton is at the end of the twenty-six mile desert across the "Big Bend" of the Carson River. Carlson, *Nevada Place Names*, 92.

47. Armitage, "Elizabeth 'Bettie' Duncan," 279. The gravestone of the Duncan's first-born child, Alphonso, who died in 1857 still stands in Pioneer Cemetery in Lawrence.

48. Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 132.

50. Between 1860 and 1875 camels were used in most of the remote areas of the West. Salt, used in the mining operation, had to be transported from a distance. "Teels Marsh was started in early 1867... and the salt was sent by long camel trains to the mills near Virginia City." Harlan D. Fowler, *Three Caravans to Yuma: The Untold Story of Bactrian Camels in Western America* (Glendale, Ca.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1980), 93.

Nevada: "Carson is a pretty place with 6 or 7 thousand inhabitants there is a mint being built there now." Crossing into California and approaching the pass in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Bettie responded to the "grand scenery" and "magnificent great rocks" even as she mourned the loss of the child.

California

As the season approached late fall, the travelers worried about mountain snows. However, as they descended the mountain pass and entered the valley near Volcano, California, they found the weather warm enough on October 19 to have produced "a mess of splendid green beans and some fine tomatoes." Reaching the Stockton area on October 22, Bettie wrote admiringly of the "fine farms and good farm houses."

In Stockton, Bettie made a significant purchase. She recorded in her diary of October 22 that she "went to a millinery shop and bought me a hat and veil [*sic*] mourning my darling Katie." (This addition to her wardrobe was the only mention of clothing in the overland diary.) The mourning veil permitted Bettie to proclaim her loss in a visible manner and to observe social forms of the era.⁵¹

As the four-month journey neared an end, Bettie Duncan faced with a heavy heart the prospects of a new home. Camped near Stockton, she concluded the diary entry of October 22:

We are now just 70 miles from San Jose. Mr Duncan thinks if no bad luck happens [to] us we will get there in 3 days but for me I care but little when we get there we have no Katie now. No what do I care for a home with out her so I want my darling Katie. I have never had any comfort without her. O for more grace in my heart

Bettie's final entry of the travel account, Wednesday October 23, told of the Lawrence party's pleasure of boating on a mountain lake. Despite taking part in this activity, her final words were: "What would I not give to be in my beloved Kansas yes my Lawrence home tonight. Why did we ever leave there?" The question remained unanswered.

San Jose, 1868

The Duncans' arrival in San Jose and establishment of a household there were not recorded. On January 1, 1868, two months after the Overland Trail

diary had ended abruptly, Bettie began a new diary in this manner:

God's goodness has spared me to see the light of another new year's day but O what a bitter and sad year this has been to me on June 24 I bade adieu to home and loved one[s] [and] with our little family started for this far off land. On and on we traveled meeting with toil and a[d]versity but on the 25th of September our idol our lovely Katie we saw cold and lifeless before us. O the anguish of our poor hearts. What desolate hearts our[s] are. What or how can we do in this our time of trial. O for grace and faith. Today I have thought so much of home and loved ones there how far far are we separated but there God is our God and in him we must put our trust. It has been raining most all day

Bettie Duncan's mood in her new California home reflected the gloomy, wet season of the year as she reestablished a pattern of work at home, worship at church, and visits with neighbors and friends. On January 8, she wrote of attending a wedding at "our church" in the company of Willie Duncan and Mrs. McGrew. That evening Mr. and Mrs. Berry, who also had made the overland journey to the San Jose area, visited the household. The Duncans and McGrews were sharing, at least temporarily, a house in San Jose. Bettie mentioned the strains of the living arrangement in her diary entry of January 23:

Cloudy and rainy again This morning Mrs McGrew and Frank went away and spent the day Mr D Willie and Mr Mc[Grew] went down town and little Cettie and me were alone most all day and it has been such a happy day to what I have had for a long time. How good it does seem to be alone with my own dear little Cettie and then we can talk of our darling Katie and none but God to see or hear us....

Bettie found some advantages in this living arrangement, however. On January 27, 1868, she wrote of being "very busy cleaning my and Willies bedroom and putting up my pretty new bookcase Mr Mc[Grew] has ornamented for me...." As the two women worked together on some household tasks, Bettie appreciated Mrs. McGrew's help with the washing and ironing. However, when the McGrew family visited overnight in Santa Clara, Bettie was glad to be alone.

During the period the families shared the household, Wesley Duncan was apparently scouting for another place in which to locate his family. This is indicated by a diary entry of early February:

February 7, 1868

Has been a little cloudy all day but very pleasant it is quite calm tonight. I wanted to go to the social at the

51. "During the 1850-90 period mourning became such a cult that hardly anyone dared defy it.... By the 1860s and 1870s elegant mourning dress was a firmly established fact in the United States of America as well as in Europe." Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 122, 132.

church but as Mr Duncan is going away in the morning we thought best not to go. I am tired tonight and cant write much tonight.

February 8, 1868

This morning we were up early to get Mr D off in the 3 o'clock train he is going by the cars to San Francisco and from there to Los Angeles by steamer. He expects to be gone over 2 weeks we will be very lonely without him. Mr McGrew is quite sick today and is no better tonight O how I would love to be home with my dear friends tonight.

When Wesley Duncan returned earlier than expected on February 15, Bettie recorded, "he did not like the country so well as he expected I feel so glad for I did not want to go there." During this period in San Jose the Duncans received letters from Lawrence. A letter from Charles Duncan, Bettie's brother-in-law, was a disappointment to her as it "contained no news at all only on business matters."⁵²

As Bettie settled into a routine in San Jose, she experienced the recurrence of symptoms similar to those she had suffered in Lawrence and which she had not alluded to during the time on the trail. In mid-February, as Bettie spent the day at home sewing, she expressed a "deep depression in spirit." Earlier she suffered a "severe chill," "back pain," and "nervousness." Whether Bettie's ill health and unmitigated grief altered her husband's plans for permanent residence in California can only be surmised. All indications had been that the family intended to stay in the Golden State. Bettie wrote on February 21: "our boxes of goods came today what we sent from home. They came all nice and in good order. They were boxed just eight months."

On the day before the arrival of the ocean freight, February 26, Bettie recorded:

It has been misting rain most all day but this evening just as we had supper ready our men got home we were glad to see them and gave them a hearty welcome. They like Gillroy and I think we may go there to live.

On the next to last entry of the San Jose diary, after five months in California, Bettie expressed her emotional state:

Sunday, March 1, 1868

Another sabbath day has come and with it a sadness I can not shake off it is so muddy I could not go to church or Sabbath School.

52. Bettie Duncan, January 28, 1868.

Return to Lawrence

The final entry of the San Jose diary gives no clue as to why the Duncans returned to Lawrence. What is known is that within ten months of their arrival in California, they were back in Kansas. Records of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Lawrence show that Elizabeth Duncan (as public records used her formal name) again was listed on the membership roll as of August 16, 1868. In addition, one of the partners whom Wesley Duncan joined in a hardware business venture later referred to 1868 as the year their enterprise was formed.⁵³ Additionally, the Lawrence city directory of 1868-1869 listed the business of Griffith, Duncan and Co. at 107 Massachusetts Street.

Details of Bettie Duncan's life after the return to Lawrence are sketchy. Two more children, a son and daughter, were born to her. She presided over a grand home near Tenth and Emery Road in Lawrence.⁵⁴ In 1874 she signed, as Mrs. Wesley Duncan, a temperance petition that was sponsored by many other Lawrence women, including her sister, Mrs. Charles S. Duncan.⁵⁵ Five years later, on September 26, 1879, Bettie Duncan died at the age of forty-two. Her obituary appeared in both Lawrence newspapers, the *Lawrence Daily Journal* and the *Lawrence Standard*. In these death notices Mrs. Wesley Duncan was described as "a consistent Christian, a fond wife, a good mother, and a friend to the needy." Both accounts mention the journey to California and the death of the child en route.⁵⁶ Lucetta, the child "Cettie" of the diaries, was seventeen and the eldest child in the family at the time of her mother's death. She preserved her mother's diaries.

Epilogue

Five years after Bettie's death, Wesley Duncan married for the third time. Pastor's records of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Lawrence record the marriage of Wesley H. Duncan, "merchant," on November 7, 1883. The minister received ten dollars. Wesley

53. A. T. Andreas [W. G. Cutler, ed.], *History of the State of Kansas*, 2 vols. (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1:337. Griffith also spent the last years of his life in California. G. W. E. Griffith, *My 96 Years in the Great West* (Los Angeles: Geo. W. E. Griffith, 1929), 276.

54. Personal Correspondence, Myra Blackman, daughter of Lucetta Duncan Stevens (the child Cettie in the diary) and granddaughter of Bettie Duncan, to author, October 7, 1987. Mrs. Blackman donated the diaries and family photographs to the Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library.

55. *Western Home Journal*, Lawrence, April 27, 1879.

56. *Lawrence Daily Journal*, September 27, 1879; *Lawrence Standard*, October 2, 1879. The date of the overland journey was given as 1868, but this, as in Wesley Duncan's biography, was in error. Wesley Duncan was most likely the source of information for both accounts.

Duncan remained a prominent businessman who kept abreast of new developments. In the *Lawrence Journal*, June 15, 1884, Duncan's advertisement described the arrival of new Studebaker wagons "fresh from the factory and with the latest improvements!" In later years he settled into the role of an old settler of Lawrence, signing the "Register of Survivors of Quantrell Raid" at the dedication of the monument for victims of the raid at Oak Hill Cemetery on May 30, 1895.⁵⁷ In the last years of his life, Wesley Duncan was again drawn to California, the third time he had gone West. His obituary, which appeared in the *Lawrence Daily Journal*, September 22, 1902, stated that in the spring before his death he made California his permanent home. He was described as "one of the best known of Lawrence pioneers."⁵⁸

Clearly, California, as an idea, a dream, a promise played a significant role in the life of Wesley Duncan. He apparently made the decision that the family would journey overland in 1867, but it well may have been that his wife, Bettie Duncan, was most influential in the decision to return to Lawrence. Her difficulty in adjusting to her new home while coping with her grief over the death of the child on the trail, may have been a deciding factor in the family's return in 1868. Both Wesley and Bettie were assuredly marked by the death of this child, as was evidenced in her diary, her obituary, and his biographical sketch published in 1879.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The Duncan family undertook the overland journey late in the years of the trail, they enjoyed greater affluence and conveniences than many others who took the two thousand-mile journey, yet many of their experiences on the trail paralleled those of earlier families. Bettie's trail diary revealed that she, as other women, was ever mindful of family and friends left behind. Even as she adjusted to the demands of life on the trail and reveled in the beauty of mountain scenery, she felt the backward pull. She, like other women, feared Indian attack, but those trepidations for her were not fulfilled. She did find the journey over the mountains and plains perilous, however. Her child's burial, as recorded in

Bettie's diary, reverberated with poignant emotions shared by other mothers who lost a child away from home. In California, in retrospect, Bettie remembered only the journey's tragedy, forgetting the pleasure of companionship of other travelers and the shared days with her husband as they met the challenges of daily trail life. In California, Bettie and Wesley resumed their separate spheres; he explored new business opportunities while she focused on her home, where grief overwhelmed her.

The motivations of husband and wife in undertaking the overland journey were different, the events along the way acted upon each dissimilarly, and the establishment of a new home affected each in diverse ways. Wesley Duncan apparently found in California, at various times in his life, adventure, opportunity, and new beginnings. He shared the prevailing American dream of a better life in the new land that drew so many westward in the nineteenth century. Bettie joined in the overland journey reluctantly. She viewed the railroad tracks on the Plains as a means to return to the home of her former life. In California, she sought to re-create the pattern of her life, at home, in church, and with friends. But, in California, she longed to return to Kansas.

The Duncans' experiences, while not typical of many of the thousands of overlanders, were similar enough to those of others to demonstrate how the journey affected the life cycle of men and women in a different manner. For Bettie Duncan the overland journey was a single event in an adult life that centered on the familiar: home, church, children. Wesley Duncan led a more varied life: he had a series of different business partners and several different businesses; he married three times; and he journeyed to California at least three times. During all the many changes in his adult life, the dream California held out to him remained a constant. As historian John Unruh has observed:

The West, as place, direction, or idea, has fascinated men since time immemorial, men who by their actions have given substance to Henry David Thoreau's poetic phrasing that "Eastward I go only by force, but westward I go free" and that "we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure."⁶⁰

In contrast, Bettie Duncan primarily found in California, a "far off land." KH

57. E. S. Tucker, comp., *The Lawrence Memorial Album* (N.p.: E. S. Tucker and Geo. O. Foster, [1895]), 3, 46, 50.

58. *Lawrence Daily Journal*, September 22, 1902.

59. *U.S. Biographical Dictionary*, Kansas Volume, 630.

60. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 90.