

By the Kansas State Historical Society

Harriet Palmer's Journey on the Oregon-California Trail

Harriet Palmer was only 11 years old when she traveled on the trail. Her family spent six months crossing the plains in an ox wagon. She wrote about her trip.

*In our home, in Illinois, ... there was much talk and excitement over the news of the great gold discoveries in California—and equally there was much talk concerning the wonderful **fertile** valleys of Oregon Territory.*

*My father...became so interested that he decided to "Go West"...The spring of 1852 **ushered** in so many preparations, great work of all kinds.*

*I remember relations coming to help sew, of tearful partings, little gifts of **remembrances** exchanged, the sale of the farm, the buying and breaking in of **unruly** oxen, the loud voices of the men, and the general confusion.*

*The first of April came... The long line of covered wagons, so clean and white, but oh so battered, torn and dirty afterward... We took a last look at our dear **homestead** as it faded from our view.*



An open road was
now before us.
The melting snows
had made the
streams high, the
roads nearly
impassable.

On and on we
journeyed...
averaging 15
miles a day over
cactus, **sagebrush**,
and hot sand.
Everybody's shoes
gave out and we
bartered with
Indians for
moccasins...

In the Cascade
mountains, Oh
that steep road! ...
We had to chain
the wagon wheels
and slide the
wagons down the ruddy, rocky road.

When we came to Ft. Walla Walla (Washington), we saw a crowing rooster on a rail fence. Oh, how we cried... There we stood, a travel worn, weary, heart and homesick group, crying over a rooster crowing.

Why did Harriet and the other travelers cry over a rooster crowing? It brought back memories. This would have been a daily activity on her farm in Illinois. This meant they had reached their new home. The long, hard journey was now behind them.

