Unfortunate Emigrants

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FROM CALIFORNIA, '46 TO '88

Chapter III.

A short time after this my uncle sent me to his brother, my Uncle George, who lived in Michigan and had a family consisting of his wife and six children. They all received me with great kindness and took the best care of me; in fact, except my relations with my grandmother, which I have described, this was about the first real sympathetic kindness that had yet been extended to me.

My father had died in 1843. After he had bound me out to my Uncle Elijah, he appeared to take but little interest in me. By his second wife he had five children. His widow, with this family and a debt hanging over the farm, had enough to do to make both ends meet, and we of the family of my father’s first wife found that we had to depend upon ourselves. At least, I found it so, and that I had to depend on my own efforts in order to gain a livelihood.

Some time after my going to live with my Uncle George he sent his son Joel and me to Niles, Michigan, with a load of wheat. Joel and I were of about the same age. He was an excellent fellow and we were good friends. When at Niles we received from a friend of his father, Hastings’ Work on California and Oregon. I believe my uncle had known Hastings, who had left Michigan in 1844. When we had read the book, my uncle declared that as soon as harvest was over and his grain sold, he would sell his farm and leave for California. Accordingly, these sales having been made and necessaries provided for the journey, we all started on our pilgrimage toward the Pacific coast, on October 14th, 1845—my birthday. Our party consisted of fourteen persons, viz.: My uncle and his wife, his wife’s mother, then ninety years of age and blind, his two small children, his two married daughters and their husbands, Ira and John Van Gordan, my two

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2 According to John Bidwell, Hastings had returned to the Midwest from California, lecturing on temperance to raise money for his book, which was published in early 1845; see “Life in California before the Gold Discovery,” Century Illustrated Magazine 41 (1890): 176. It was presumably on this lecture tour that Hastings met George Harlan.
sisters, Sarah and Malinda, his nephew, G. W. Harlan, some others, and myself.³

We had eleven wagons, ten of our teams being of oxen, and one of horses. At that time there was very little movement from that part of the country toward California. It was sometimes difficult to make people believe that that country was our destination. At Joliet, Ill., for instance, we were camped and had a large fire, for it was frosty. An Irishman drove up with a team and asked where we were going. One of our party said, “to California;” upon which he got into a rage and swore that he would not be made game of, and he threatened violence to our whole company. Some of our boys ran him off, and he escaped. He was not the only one who doubted our being bound for the Northwest coast. In passing through Hancock County, Ill., we met with an accident which detained us for a week. My uncle’s son, Elisha, fell out of the wagon and a wheel passed over his body. A doctor who was called, in trying to bleed the boy, cut an artery, and the poor little fellow came near bleeding to death. In about a week he got well enough to travel.

Our stay in Hancock County gave us some experience of the Mormons. Nauvoo was not far off. A short time before we encamped here, several foraging parties—I think they called them “destroying angels”—were sent out by the Mormon leaders to gather corn belonging to the Gentiles. The Gentiles objected to having their corn thus taken, and the result was a fight in which the Gentiles lost seven men and the Mormons more. Near where we were camped was a well into which the Gentiles had thrown the bodies of seventeen saints who had been killed in the fight. The house of the farmer on whose land we were encamped was full of holes of bullets which had been fired into it during the engagement. At this time the Mormons had been driven out of Missouri, where their killing of many citizens, their

³ Harlan’s count of fourteen people is undoubtedly wrong. In the next paragraph he states that the party had eleven wagons, which would have required that everyone but the blind mother-in-law and the two small children drive teams, an entirely improbable scenario. Family tradition records that the party actually numbered thirty-two individuals in a complex web of relationships; see Brent Galloway, “Editor’s Note Number One,” San Leandro Recollections 5 (September 1973): 11–14.

Peter L. Wimmer had married Polly Harlan, Jacob’s cousin; after her death Wimmer remained on good terms with his former father-in-law, though by 1846 he had remarried. His second wife, Elizabeth Jane Baiz, née Cloud, was known as Jennie. Legend has it that she was making soap at Coloma one day when John Marshall used her kettle to test a lump of metal which proved to be gold and sparked the gold rush that changed California’s history forever. Though they were technically no relation to him, Harlan refers to the Wimmers as his aunt and uncle.
wounding of Gov. Boggs of that State and their other rascalities had made them odious. When we were near them in Hancock County, we learned that they had determined to leave Nauvoo; that their first intent was to go to Vancouver's Island, but their prophet and president had changed this, having had a revelation that they must go to Salt Lake, and there found a great people, who would in time wipe all Gentiles off from the face of the earth. This short experience of the Mormons I Afterwards found useful when I had contact with many of them on the Pacific Coast. I have always found that when they have felt safe in doing so they have been ready to act in hostility to the Gentile. It may be that I err, but I believe that but for the discovery of gold and the consequent coming of so many people to California, the Mormons would have taken California.

When I first arrived in Yerba Buena—now San Francisco—the Mormons were strong there. If one needed a laborer to do a piece of work, the chance was that a Mormon would be on hand to do it. If one wished to have his clothes washed, a Mormon woman would be the washer-woman. When a ball was given to Com. Stockton, at Leidesdorff's house, at the corner of Kearny and Clay streets, the majority, if not all, of the females were Mormon women. All this was happily swamped and lost in the flood of immigration, which the discovery of gold directed to California, and the Mormons had to take a back seat. 4

Chapter IV.

At Quincy, Ill., we remained a few hours to rest our teams, and to buy some necessary things, and we came near being taken for saints. Our wagon covers were painted to make them water-proof, and each had its driver's name painted on it. A green-looking Sucker came gawking along spelling these names. When he came to John Van Gordan's wagon, he began to spell, and got as far as V-a-n, Van, when he shouted, "Vancouver's Island!" "Why, that's where the — Mormons are going. These fellows are Mormons," which was not a very safe or pleasant accusation at the time and place. John, however, corrected his spelling and his notions by treating to a kind of cyclone in the shape of a strong application of a big ox-whip, and we had no trouble.

We crossed the Mississippi at Hannibal, and at Brunswick we met Mr. [William Squire] Clark, who had lost much of his property in a great

4 Harlan's description of the Mormon situation is distorted but relatively mild compared to much that had been written about the Latter-day Saints by his contemporaries. The Wimmers were said have been Mormons, but Harlan does not mention this.
flood, which had done much damage to the latter place. When told that we were bound for California, he vowed he would go too, which he did. He settled in San Francisco, and gave to "Clark's Point," the name which it bears to-day.

We wintered at Lexington, LaFayette County, Missouri. We had not been long there, when a steamboat arrived, bringing one hundred and fifty Sac and Fox Indians from Iowa, who were on their way to a reservation in Kansas Territory. Two of Black Hawk's sons were among them, fine-looking fellows. One, we found, weighed two hundred and fifty the other two hundred and fifteen pounds. My uncle made a contract with the agent to move them to Westport, on the boundary between Missouri and Kansas Territory. It took all our teams to haul their effects, their children and those who could not walk.

We started on Christmas day and travelled about five miles when there came on a severe snow storm. In a short time the road became covered so that we lost our way and we had to camp on a small creek among shrub oaks. We had attended to our animals and prepared for supper and were warming ourselves at the campfire when John Van Gordan, in pulling a pistol from his pocket accidentally discharged it, and shot my cousin G. W. Harlan who was stooping over the fire. The ball entered his right hip and passed upward. He cried out that he was killed and fell backward. This caused much confusion among the Indians. They were all on their feet in an instant. No interpreter was present to explain to them the cause of the shooting and matters were serious, as there were some seventy-five armed Indian warriors all under great excitement. Finally one of those sons of Black Hawk came forward. He could speak some English, and being informed about the accident he explained it to the Indians and pacified them. He then called the Indian medicine man, who carefully traced the course of the ball which he found under the right nipple, and said that by proper treatment the young man would get well. Next day a doctor came with an ambulance and took George back to Lexington. The rest of us with our Indian freight went on to Westport, and returning by way of Independence we found our patient rapidly getting well.

Chapter V.

During this winter, through the care and kind treatment of my uncle and his family, I had much improved health. They always had prevented my doing any hard work which they thought would injure me. With returning health and strength I began to think it time for me to do something toward my own maintenance. Much hemp was raised in the part of Missouri, where we were wintering, and I found a chance to earn wages in
braking hemp. My uncle at first objected to my engaging in this, but finally said I might go at it, and he would watch me lest it might injure me. Far different this from his brother's conduct toward me.

One morning in January I began work for a farmer who had 400 slaves, a few of whom were nearly as white as any of us. The slave that I chose as my teacher in this new kind of work was named Jacob, the same as myself, and was of fairer complexion, than I, having reddish hair and blue eyes. He told me that his mother was a slave and a quadroon, and his father was his master. He also told me that three very pretty girls with his same complexion and who were in his mother's house, were his sisters, his master's daughters, and were the special servants of "Missus." The house in which this contraband family of "Massa" lived was much superior to the houses of the rest of the slaves. It was a comfortable log house, lined and neatly kept. The other slaves lived in common log-cabins. Jake made a wide distinction between his family and the other slaves. He called the latter "niggers."

Aside from this the master was a very good man, and kind to his slaves. Sometimes, however, when a slave would behave badly, Jake said, master would sell him to Louisiana people and the negro would not be heard of again.

The master's next neighbor had a large force of slaves and was very different in his treatment of them. This man, one night, came home drunk from town, and meeting one of his slaves, an old man, cursed him as good for nothing and killed him. My uncle found this to be true, as the murderer was arrested and fined $50, as punishment for doing it. He was a white "gentleman" and old Sam was only a "nigger." I learned also that Jake's master was permitting him to buy his freedom. His value was set at $1500, and Jake had already made and paid $1200, and would pay the balance in three years.

At first the work was very severe upon me, and I did not get through with a very great quantity of hemp. The "master," at the end of my first day, weighed my quantity and found it to be only forty-seven pounds. Jake being an old hand, his quantity was found to be two hundred pounds. The "master" then said to me that I had earned thirty-seven and one-half cents, but that Jake had earned one dollar and fifty cents, of which Jake's share was fifty cents; that in this way Jake was buying his freedom; that he hated to lose him, and could have sold him on the previous Saturday for two thousand dollars, but he preferred to let him buy his freedom in this way, and afterwards to let him work for wages as a free man.

On the succeeding Saturday I attended the slave auction. There was quite a large number of buyers. The slaves were in an enclosure, men, women, and children together, and they were sold off rapidly, without regard, evidently, to the separating of members of families. To me it looked very cruel and it affected me deeply. The last slave that was sold
was a young girl. The auctioneer said: "Gentlemen, this girl is the last that we can offer you to-day, and I want you to bid up quickly on her. You can see that in form, color, and beauty she cannot be surpassed in La Fayette County. Her age is seventeen years and eight months, and she is an excellent servant." One of the bidders desired that her mouth be opened, that he might see her teeth. She was caused to do this, and a most beautiful set she had. Then the bidding went on; $400, $500, $600, $800, and so on until she was knocked down at $2,500. Her buyer asked how much negro blood she had, and was told that she had about one-eighth.

I never went to any more slave sales. The whole thing looked abominable to me. I came away with feelings of sadness and disgust.

I continued working among the hemp until Spring, and became quite handy at it. I earned enough to pay for my full outfit for the journey, and had forty dollars left. About my best investment was in a dapple grey mule, which afterwards proved a good friend when such a friend was much needed by me.

Chapter VI.

With the opening of Spring we made ready to start, and a very important part of our preparation was the marrying of two couples of our young folks, the natural result of a winter’s close contact in camp.

Our first destination was Indian Creek, in Kansas, which was the place of rendezvous of California and Oregon emigrants. Here we found about five hundred wagons, two-thirds of which were bound for Oregon.

On April 5 [May 9], 1846,5 we had a grand time. About five hundred people came from Missouri to see us off and bid us God-speed. Rev. Mr. Dunleavy, one of the emigrants, preached a sermon. He was quite eloquent, and his discourse had a powerful effect upon us all.6

On April 6 [May 12] we bade adieu to the "States" and started for our land of promise. The California emigration moved together for three days,

5 On May 8 Edwin Bryant recorded: "A party from Michigan, under the direction of Mr. Harlan, we learned, was encamped in a grove of timber about a mile beyond us....They had been in their present encampment more than a month, but appeared to be contented and happy, and, with the numerous women and children, who greatly outnumbered the men, to possess a persevering energy and confidence in the future, that would sustain them in a journey round the globe, whatever might be its difficulties." Bryant, What I Saw in California.

6 Bryant wrote on May 9: "Numerous parties of ladies and gentlemen from the neighboring villages visited our camp in the course of the day, and attended divine service, the exercises of which were performed by the Rev. Mr. Dunleavy of the Methodist Episcopal church, one of the emigrants to California."
Ex-Gov. Boggs, of Missouri, being captain; then we were divided into two parties. He went on in command of one-half. The other half, in which was our party, then elected Judge Moran [Josiah Morin], of Missouri, as captain. They wished to elect my uncle, but he refused the command. For some time everything went on smoothly enough. In our company there was a preacher—for such he claimed to be—named [Peter] Inman. He thought that he was not recognized, but several of us knew him to be no preacher at all, but a man who had been imprisoned in Kosciusko County, Ind., for being a horse thief, and had broken jail and escaped by crawling through a stove-pipe hole in the roof. He became very wroth at our captain, because, as he said, the latter did not preserve proper discipline. He complained about this mostly to the young men, appearing afraid to approach the captain or my uncle. We young folks decided to gratify his ambition, and have some fun as well. At night our camp was made by drawing all the wagons into a circle, and after supper we held a meeting of some 30 or 40 youngsters. We had speeches and a great show of enthusiasm. Finally, it was moved and unanimously voted that Captain Moran had failed in his duty, by not keeping proper discipline, and that he should be turned out of office. Then Inman was nominated, and he was elected with a tremendous hurrah. The older men, startled by the noise, ran out to see what was up. I called my uncle and the captain aside and explained it to them. I begged them not to interfere with our fun, and told them that we boys had elected Inman to-night and to-morrow night we would put him out. The boys lifted him up and carried him in procession all about the camp, with great shouting and applause.

Next morning, Inman ordered every team to be ready to start at 6 A. M., and that any who were not then ready should be left behind, and not allowed to join the company again. Accordingly all were ready at the appointed time except one old man named [Edward Gantt] Pyle, whose oxen had strayed away, and could not be readily found. The order was to march in four platoons. Four wagons should start together, keeping twenty feet apart. Then four more should move in the same manner, and so on till all were under way.

My uncle had eighty head of two-year old cattle, and he was ordered to keep them half a mile to the rear. Inman rode back and forth all day giving orders, and was on the run most of the time, so that some time before we got to camp his horse gave out, when he was far in the rear seeing if the loose cattle were nearer than the half mile. Before he could get to the front

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7 Harlan has transposed events. The election was held May 11, before the emigrants left. Bryant records on that day that George Harlan withdrew from the meeting, saying that smaller trains would travel more quickly and easily. Bryant continues, "This view was afterwards found to be entirely correct."
again the older men had camped and turned their stock loose to graze. He was in a great rage at this but could not help himself. That night he called a meeting of the young men, and stated his grievances to them, and asked their views and their advice. Just then old man Pyle came into camp, and said Inman had done him great wrong and had endangered the lives of himself and family, by making him camp half a mile away from the rest of us without any protection from the Sioux, who would like nothing better than to kill him and his wife and daughters. These daughters were nice pretty girls, and some of the young men had already begun to cast sheep's eyes in their direction; so the old man's talk made quite a sensation, and young Billy McDonald\(^8\) moved that Inman should be forthwith turned out of office and Captain Moran reinstated. I seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously. Inman was wrothy at me for this. As I got down from my wagon Inman was standing beside his wife, across the corral, armed with bowie knife and rifle. As he aimed at me, I thought I could see right down the barrel. He pulled the trigger, but his gun snapped. I quickly brought my rifle to bear on him, but my uncle knocked it upward as I fired, and my ball only cut a groove on the top of Inman's head. There was much excitement in camp, and some young men wanted to lynch him, but the wisdom of the older men prevented this. He was ordered to leave camp, and we got rid of him.\(^9\)

Chapter VII.

We proceeded very happily till we reached the South Platte. Every night we young folks had a dance on the green prairie. Our musician was usually a young fellow named Frank Kellogg,\(^10\) who played the fiddle pretty well, but from time to time, as our musician, we would get Ann Eliza Fowler. She was a young lady who afterwards became my wife, and in playing the fiddle she could just knock the hind-sights off Frank or anyone in the train.\(^11\)

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8 Probably William McDonnell, age twenty-one, a teamster for the Kellogg brothers; he later married Eleanor Graves of the Donner party.
10 Benjamin Franklin Ephraim Kellogg, traveling with his brother Florentine Erwin and Florentine's family. The Kelloggs first settled in the Napa Valley but later moved to southern California.
11 Jennie Wimmer reported, "Mrs. Jacob Harlan and her sister Minerva were expert violinists, and the character of music furnished the dancers was superb."
On the Platte we stayed a week, laying in a stock of buffalo meat. We encamped about two miles from a buffalo lick, to which thousands of those animals came to lick the salt with which the earth was impregnated. July 4th found us filled with buffalo meat and patriotism, and after our usual dance, we youngsters drew up in a line to fire a salute, which was done without other loss of killed or wounded than a young fellow named Bill Richardson, who, in order to make greater noise, had overloaded his yäger rifle and got knocked a rod or so out of line, his rifle flying forty feet away.

The lick was very large, extending for several miles. In hunting we would divide into squads of five or six, and when the animals came to the lick we would fire at them. In this way we killed twenty-two on our first day’s hunt. We cut the meat into thin slabs about as large as a common-sized shingle, and dried it in the sun. One morning we came upon a bull much bigger than any that we had yet seen. He was a monster in size and in fierceness. My rifle was larger in the bore than any of the rest, and it fell to me to shoot him. There were several others with him, and for some little time I could not get a fair shot at him. Finally I got a bead on a vital spot on him and fired. He fell, but was on his feet again in an instant. He saw me, and immediately charged me. I ran for my life, expecting every moment to be lifted on his horns. At last, when my breath and strength were gone, I stumbled on a buffalo chip, and fell headlong. Turning my head, I saw that my bull had fallen about two rods behind me. I immediately rose and cut his throat, and received the congratulations of my companions. I did not wholly escape damage, however. My hands and knees were full of thorns of the prickly pear, which was abundant on the prairie, and in my eagerness to bag that big bull I had not observed that I was laying in a stock of thorns, which would give me much acute suffering.

In the afternoon of this day we witnessed a grand sight. Luckily we had just got into camp, when there came toward us a band of fully one thousand buffalos, running with great swiftness, and reckless of any obstacle which might be in their way. The ground fairly trembled under their tread. About one hundred mounted Sioux, armed with bows and arrows, were pursuing them. Four or five Indians would run up to a fat cow, and shoot arrows into her until she would fall dead. We saw them kill about a dozen in this manner. If our camp had happened to be in the course of their stampede, none of us could have escaped.

Having laid in our stock of buffalo meat, we proceeded to Fort Laramie. Here we found encamped a large body of Sioux. About five

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12 Harlan has gotten events out of sequence. The emigrants were past Fort Laramie by July 4.
hundred of their warriors had just returned from a fight with the Pawnees. We were told that they had killed about one hundred and fifty of their enemies, and had lost about eighty of their own warriors in the fight. They had also taken a great many ponies. When we were there these Sioux had their war dance. They were all in war paint, and danced around a big fire, with the Pawnee scalps in their hands. The one who had taken the most scalps received greatest honor. They were hideous to behold.

We had some fear that these savages would steal our animals, but the white men at the fort assured us that we need have no fear of their doing so. We made some presents to the old chief, which pleased him much, and he told us through an interpreter that our stock was safe, and that we need not guard it. We found this to be true, and lost no animals by those Indians.

Chapter VIII.

From Laramie we kept on to Fort Bridger, where we halted for three days. Here we met a man named L. W. Hastings, who had written the book which I have mentioned. He had just come from California, and professed to know all about the proper way to get there. He got all the emigrants together, and recommended that we leave the old trail and make a cut off from Bridger to pass round the south end of Salt Lake, and strike the Humboldt river one hundred and fifty miles above its sink. He said we would thus save three hundred miles of travel, it being that much nearer than the way by Fort Hall. There was a difference of opinion among our chief men. Governor Boggs and his company, our captain, Judge Moran, and some others were in favor of the Fort Hall route, but my uncle and old man Pyle, and James F. Reid, and George Donner were in favor of the cut-off recommended by Hastings.13

While at this place I got me a complete suit of buckskin, which with moccasins and my ornamenting myself with some Indian paint, made our young folks take me for Captain Bridger’s half-breed son. I paid for my frolic rather dearly, as it took no little time and trouble to get the paint off. While here, also, an old mountaineer named Bill Williams came to us to buy a rifle. He examined nearly every rifle in camp. Mine was a good one—the same with which I killed that big buffalo. With him this rifle failed to pass inspection. He declared that the only good piece in our whole company was John Van Gordan’s. I told Williams that the latter was an

13 Reed and Donner undoubtedly did deliberate about the route with the Harlans and others at some point; many years later Harlan may have confused such a discussion with a similar one at Fort Bridger, thus accounting for his peculiar notion that the Donner party was there at the same time he was.
unlucky gun, and that with it John had shot and nearly killed my cousin, and also had clipped a piece off the ear of another of our company, and that if he bought it he would get killed with it. He said to me: "See here, young man, I have hunted and trapped in these mountains for sixty years, and you need not think, for all of your buckskin dress, that you can teach me anything about a rifle. Just get back under your wagon and keep on mending your moccasins, and let me alone." So I said no more to him. He then stepped off one hundred and fifty yards, and put up a mark, came back and carefully examined the rifle, and asked John his price. John said $20. Williams paid him that sum, and then heavily loaded the gun to see, as he said, how she would carry for that distance. He aimed at his mark and fired. The rifle burst at the breech. A piece of the barrel ten inches long was split out, the stock torn to pieces. The lock flew across the corral fifty feet, and wounded me slightly on the leg. I ran across the corral and found old Williams lying flat on his back, and with his legs and body full of splinters. I helped him up, and after Bridger had restored him with some whiskey, he cried out that since he had hunted and trapped in the mountains he had been wounded a hundred times, and been struck by lightning twice, and that nothing, not even a — mean rifle, could kill him.  

Chapter IX.

Our journey from Fort Bridger to Salt Lake was both difficult and disagreeable, especially when we had to travel through the sage-brush and grease-wood. When we had come to within a half mile of the lake we halted at "Weber cañon," a pass which for about a half mile seemed impracticable. Our four head men held a council. Reid and Donner declared it to be impossible for us to get through. My uncle and old man Pyle felt sure that we could; so there was a split. Reid and Donner turned, and trailed back for three days, and then crossed the mountains. We worked six days building a road, and got through on the seventh day. This put Reid and Donner ten days behind us. If they had helped us we would have got through on the fourth day. We then continued on round the south

14 Edwin Bryant recorded the incident on July 19: "Bill Smith, a noted mountain character, in a shooting-match burst his gun, and he was supposed for some time to be dead. He recovered, however, and the first words he uttered upon returning to consciousness were, that 'no d-d gun could kill him.'"

15 Harlan, Pyle, Reed, and Donner. Although writers frequently refer to the "Harlan-Young party," Harlan nowhere mentions Samuel C. Young, nor are the Harlans mentioned in the lengthy "Biographical Obituary: Samuel C. Young," San Jose Pioneer, November 9, 1878; reprinted in Crossroads 6 (Fall 1995): 9–12.
end of the lake, crossing the river Jordan, a small stream, which runs out of Utah lake into Salt Lake. We passed many beautiful springs, but on trial the water was found to be saltish, and we were distressed by want of good water till we reached a range of mountains, where we laid in a supply of fresh water for the ninety-mile desert. We started on our passage over this desert in the early morning, trailed all day and all night, and all next day and next night, and on the morning of the third day our guide told us that water was still twenty-five miles distant. Our teams were so exhausted that they could not haul the wagons. We had to unyoke them and drive them to the water, then back again to fetch the wagons. William Fowler here lost his seven yoke of oxen. The man who was in charge of them went to sleep, and the cattle turned back and recrossed desert—or perhaps died there. Thus he was left with his two wagons, and no teams to haul them. It was a hard case, as he had a large family with him. He had married my sister, Malinda, after we left Fort Bridger. Then he had his mother, a half brother, and three sisters, one of whom was a Mrs. Hargrave (wife of John Hargrave, who died and was buried here), and her four small children. Also, he had with him two brothers named Musgrave, one of whom was his stepfather. The rest of our company helped him with teams, and he managed to keep with us.

After having passed the desert, we found it necessary to rest our animals for three days, they were so exhausted and spirit-broken. On arriving at the Humboldt river we found that Governor Boggs' party was some seventy miles in advance of us, the Fort Hall route being the better after all. My uncle searched all our wagons, and found that we had not half enough of provisions to take us through. He ordered me to mount my mule, which I had bought with the money earned in hemp-breaking; to take with me Tom Smith; to go on quickly in advance to Sutter's Fort, in California; to get twelve head of Spanish cattle, and a supply of provisions, and to meet him and the party on the east side of the Sierra Nevada. He gave us a little flour and bacon to last till we should overtake Governor Boggs' party, and a letter to Sutter stating the condition of our company.

The Indians on the Humboldt were at this time hostile and very troublesome, killing the emigrants, and stealing their stock whenever they could.

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16 William Fowler captained the company in which the Curtises traveled; see McDougall, note 2.
17 Hargrave had actually been buried back in Tooele Valley, not at Donner Spring. His widow, Catherine, later married George Harlan, Sr.
18 Despite their misfortune, the family arrived safely at their destination; page 133 of the 1850 Napa County census lists six consecutive households of individuals named Musgrave, Harlin, Hardgrave, and Fowler.
19 Smith was a nephew of Elizabeth Duncan Harlan, George Harlan's wife.
get a chance. We managed to work our way down to the sink of the Humboldt without being attacked. A short time before we intended to camp, Smith having fallen a little behind, ran forward to me and said that some Indians had shot arrows at him. He was much frightened. I made him go back with me, and presently we saw some twenty Indians, who started to run. Tom and I both fired, and brought down two of them. We then rode around a point of willows, and having watched them for a while, we mounted, and after eight or ten miles' travel, we camped, eat our supper, and slept for two or three hours. We were awakened by the snorting of the mules. On the frontier a mule is better than any watch-dog. If an Indian, or a bear, or wolf approaches one's camp, the mule is sure to give the alarm. So we were up in an instant, with our rifles ready. The night was clear and bright, and we could plainly see a party of Indians a short distance off. There were thirty or forty of them, and they had no brush or other means of hiding or lying in ambush. I told my companion to be of good courage, and keep cool, and that we must advance toward the savages and fire upon them. We did so, and shot two more of them. Tom had two pistols, and I had three. These we also fired at them, and they all ran off in a general stampede. From the number of our shots, they doubtless thought that we had been reinforced. We immediately reloaded our arms, saddled up, and went forward. Having travelled about half a mile, we found a board sticking by the side of the trail warning emigrants that the Indians were hostile and dangerous. It stated that on the previous day Governor Boggs' party had a severe fight with the Indians; that one man named Salley was killed in the fight, and Ben Lippincott badly wounded; that they had killed about forty Indians; that the savages fought with poisoned arrows, tipped with the venom of the rattlesnake; that many Indians had concentrated at this point to steal stock, and murder emigrants, and that they had buried Salley in the road, and run the wagons over the grave to conceal it. Notwithstanding these precautions, a few rods past this notice we found poor Salley's body. The savages had found the grave, dug him up, scalped him, and mutilated his body in a cruel manner.20

Chapter X.

We had now to begin another desert journey, there being forty miles of desert from the sink of the Humboldt to the Truckee river. We started

20 Lienhard found a similar message, but in a note stuck on a bush; he does not mention Salley's death or his grave; see From St. Louis to Sutter's Fort, 144. According to Bryant, Sallee was a member of West's emigrant company; see What I Saw in California, 249.
early in the morning and traveled all day. At night we encamped at seven miles distance from the Truckee, at some brackish springs called Steamboat Springs.\(^{21}\) The grass was fair, and we found some wagons and people of Gov. Boggs's party. One of the men of this party named Savage\(^ {22}\) here lost his wife. She died that night and was buried next morning. Our seven miles hence to the Truckee was very difficult, being all the way through deep sand. About noon we arrived at that river, and there overtook Gov. Boggs's company in camp attending to their wounded. To us, this overtaking our old friends seemed like coming home. We reported to Gov. Boggs the condition of our company and about our difficulties on the Hastings cut off, and also about the secession from us of Reid and Donner at the Weber cañon. Also, we told him of our experience with the savages on our road. He commended us highly, saying that our march down the Humboldt through a country swarming with hostile savages, and our successful encounters with them, were most daring and showed true courage. In fact, he made heroes of us. He examined his wagons and found that he would spare our company 700 pounds of flour and some bacon, which I received, and hired a man named Bonsell\(^ {23}\) to watch these provisions till our party should arrive. I gave him one of my pistols for his protection. He was a giant and as brave as a lion. He guarded these provisions alone for about two weeks, when our party reached him. I also got what I thought was enough flour and bacon to take us to Sutter's Fort, and thanking the Governor for his great kindness we started on our way to that place. When we camped on the second night I found that Tom had lost his bacon, so I had to divide with him, and soon there was none left. For the last three days we had only a little flour and water. When we arrived at Johnson's rancho, forty miles from Sutter's Fort, and heard the cocks crowing, and saw the pastures covered with fat cattle and horses, and with the view of the grand Sacramento valley spread out before us, I was reminded of my dream, which I have described, and of my grandmother's having foretold on her death-bed that I should be cured of my consumption and be a well man. I traded my mule to Johnson for a pinto horse, and got from him some dried

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\(^ {21}\) Harlan has apparently confused Steamboat Springs with Brady's Hot Springs, but the latter is close to twenty miles from the Truckee river.

\(^ {22}\) Probably mountain man James D. Savage, whom Lienhard (and others) regarded as a ruffian. Savage is said to have discovered the Yosemite Valley.

\(^ {23}\) This is likely the "long-legged" man Lienhard refers to as Bunzel (or Buntsel), who took Hastings Cutoff; see *From St. Louis to Sutter's Fort*, 105, 110. Harlan is evidently mistaken in thinking him a member of Boggs's group. In 1849 Harlan crossed the San Joaquin River at Bonsell's ferry: "In many ways Bonsell was a good man, but he was terrible fellow when hostile. He had just finished hanging six men from the limb of a tree." *California '46 to '88*, 141.
beef, but we found the latter to be so spoiled that notwithstanding our hun­
ger we could not stomach it, and we threw it away.

Having arrived at the Fort, I presented my uncle’s letter to Capt. Sutter, and explained to him the condition of our company and what we needed. He said he could not help us with cattle, as he had none of the kind which were suitable. He gave us enough provisions to take us back to our com­pany, and also a letter to Capt. [Theodor] Cordua, who lived where Marys­ville now is, requesting that gentleman to furnish us with twelve head of cattle, and he (Sutter) would be responsible for them. On our presenting this letter to Cordua, he caused [Michael C.] Nye, his vaquero, to rodeo the cattle and pick us out twelve of his choice oxen; and I have never seen a dozen finer cattle than he chose for us. I afterwards became intimate with Nye. He married a daughter of Mr. Graves. Next morning, when I went to get my horse to take the cattle from the corral and start back with them, I was astounded by Tom Smith’s saying to me, “Jake, I am not going back again across those mountains. I can get twenty-five dollars a month to enlist with the recruiting officer, and join Fremont’s force and go with him to fight the Spaniards.” I asked him what he supposed I could do without his help. He answered with an oath that he did not care what I should do, and that the company might all die before he would go back. For a time his answer stupefied me. I went to Capt. Cordua and told him how my com­rade was treating me. Cordua declared that he ought to be shot. I answered that it would not do in this way to give Tom his deserts, as he had in our company a sister and her husband and their two children, and it would bring misery upon them. Cordua then made me turn my horse out, and gave me a fresh horse and two Indians to help me. Cordua was a German, and one of the best and most charitable men that I ever met.

Chapter XI.

On my return eastward over the mountains, I reached Johnson’s rancho on the first night, and encamped there. Next day I started early, and drove till dusk, as I wished to tire the cattle so that they would lie down and give me a chance to sleep. They would rest for two or three hours, and then try to go back home to their former range. I did not unsaddle my horse, but lay with my rope in my hand, and slept, as it were, with one eye open. My Indians slept soundly all night. I could then speak no Spanish, and could not give them orders. So they left me to do the greater part of the work.

24 Actually, Nye married the widowed Harriet Murphy Pike of the Donner party. He had been a member of the Bidwell-Bartleson party of 1841, the first over­land emigrant company to California.
On the third day I met Stanton and Pike [McCutchen] of the Reid and Donner party. They were going to Sutter's Fort for provisions, and told me that the Donner party was over one hundred miles behind my company. I told them what a Judas Tom Smith was, and asked them if they were going to return and save the lives of the members of their company as I was doing for mine. Stanton declared that he would do so, or die in the attempt. The poor man kept his word, and died in doing as he had promised. At Bear valley, on the west side of the mountains, we met a part of Governor Boggs' party, and camped with them. I told them of the beautiful land where I had been, and left them next morning full of desire to get there.

Upon the second bench of the mountains, about two miles from this camp, one of my largest steers suddenly became possessed of some evil spirit, and ran back to where we had passed the night. I tried every way to turn him and get him to go up the mountain with the rest, but without success. The parties with whom I had stayed the night previous were still in camp, and told me that if I would kill him they would buy the beef. I did so. The two Indians and I took what meat we needed, and that party paid me $80 for the rest. We crossed the mountain range without much further trouble, and met our company just beginning to come up with their teams so worn out that they could hardly walk. When my uncle saw me coming with such a fine lot of oxen, he ran to me, caught my hands in his, and wept for joy. He assembled the whole company, and told them that they should never forget the service which I had done them, but hold me in gratitude and respect during their whole lives. We yoked the Spanish cattle to the wagons, and got over the mountains with little trouble.

A few miles before we reached Johnson's rancho we met Stanton with two Indians, returning with supplies for the Reid and Donner party, and at night we encamped at that rancho, full of thanks, which we rendered where it was due, for our delivery from desert and mountain, and our happy arrival in our land of promise. The next morning, October 25, 1846, heavy rain fell. This rainfall must have been that, which in the shape of snow, stopped the Donner party on the east side of the Sierra. In the midst of the storm a man appeared riding slowly down the mountain toward our camp. On his reaching us, we recognized James F. Reid. He was nearly worn out with fatigue and suffering. We entertained and restored him as we best could. Reid gave us a full account of what had happened to the party of him and Donner after they left us at Weber canón. He and Donner deeply regretted their not having stayed with us and helped us to build the road through that pass. He now saw that if they had done so, he and

25 Another confusion of Pike and McCutchen; see Thornton, note 26, and Reed, note 6.
their whole party would have been safe through all their difficulties, as we were. He told us that after leaving us they went back some two days' travel, turned to the southwest, and crossed over a low depression in the Wasatch range. They had a very hard time in getting into Salt Lake valley, which they entered fifty miles south of where we did. In crossing the desert they were obliged to unyoke their cattle, drive them to water, and then return to bring on the wagons as we had done.

Reid's cattle got away like those belonging to Fowler of our company, and he thus lost sixteen head, leaving him with only a cow and a calf. The rest of the party furnished him with teams, and they all succeeded in reaching the Humboldt river. Here they took an inventory of their provisions, and found it necessary to put the whole party on short allowance, which must continue till Stanton could return from Sutter's Fort with supplies. This, together with their other troubles, made everyone very irritable. They found the rocky ford of the Humboldt to be so difficult that they were obliged to double the teams in crossing, yoking six oxen to each wagon. Reid was absent hunting game, and Elliott was driving his team. During the work of crossing John Snyder and Elliott were quarrelling, and nearly fighting, when Reid returned from hunting. Snyder was whipping his own team very severely, and Reid remonstrated with him for his cruelty. Snyder answered abusively, and said Reid and he might settle the dispute at once. Reid told him to wait till they got up the hill, but Snyder struck him on the head with the butt end of his oxwhip, and repeated his blows several times, drawing blood. Mrs. Reid ran toward them to stop the trouble, when Snyder struck her also. This so stirred Reid's Scotch-Irish blood, and enraged him so, that drawing his hunting-knife, he gave Snyder a thrust with it. The knife entered Snyder's left breast, cutting two ribs, entering the left lung, and inflicting a mortal wound, of which he died in about fifteen minutes. The whole company were much excited by this occurrence. Some of the members were for lynching Reid, and a wagon-tongue was put up, and other preparations made to hang him; but finally, after much discussion, it was determined not to hang him, but to make him leave the party without any food. He thereupon took his gray racing mare, bade his family farewell, and overtook us at Johnson's rancho, as I have stated. Reid told us he was bound for Sutter's Fort, and would return at once. He did not do so, however, but went to San José, and returned later. 27

26 This apparent reference to Gravelly Ford as the location of the Reed-Snyder fight suggests that Harlan was familiar with McGlashan's history, though he obviously did not consult it during most of the writing of his memoir.
27 Harlan overlooks Reed and McCutchen's unsuccessful attempt to take supplies to the emigrants before Reed went to San José.
Chapter XII.

As to what afterwards happened to this Donner party, my information has been derived from the common report among us emigrants, and from conversations which I have had with many of those who were so fortunate to escape. Stanton got back to them in safety, but the amount of provisions which he was able to convey was soon consumed. The party was camped near a lake which we then knew as “Truckee Lake,” but is now known as “Donner Lake.” They there built cabins and were all snowed in. Some said that the snow was twenty feet deep. They lived upon their starving cattle until the snow buried them. After this they had no meat, but cooked and ate hides and bones and offal of cattle, whose flesh had been previously consumed. They were suffering all the pains of starvation, and at last the flesh of those who died was eaten by the starving survivors. In that way, only, could they save their lives. Stanton took supplies to them through the deep snow twice. The last time he tried to return with a party of the strongest of those in the Donner camp, and two Indians who had gone over with him, but he became snow-blind and died. The rest followed the two Indians who knew the way. One night the Indians slipped off and left them without other guide than the bloody tracks of the Indians’ feet. When the party got out of the snow they overtook the Indians, one of whom was already dead, and the other died within an hour after. This party all escaped except Stanton and one or two others, and the two Indians.

Stanton was a true hero. He endured all these labors and privations, and gave his life in order to aid and save this Donner party, not one member of which was of kin to him.28

At last a relief party was sent by Commodore Sloat. There were seven men in this party. I knew most of them personally. There was Moultrie, Glover, the brothers Rhodes [Rhoads], Joe Still [Sel], Ned Copymire, and another whose name I forget [Tucker]. They started from Johnson’s rancho, stopping at the snow line to make snow shoes. They then left their mules and all the provisions which they could not carry, and, with what they could carry on their backs, they made the journey of seventy miles over the snow to the Donner camps. The snow upon which they traveled was sometimes over fifteen feet deep. When they came near the camps they cried out to the survivors, and all who were able to move rushed out of the cabins. Moultrie told us that they were in a dreadful condition and reduced almost to skeletons. He said that some wept and others prayed and returned thanks for this partial relief. They told the relief party of their months of suffering,

28 Harlan’s previous description of his own mission to bring back supplies is perhaps an unconscious attempt to draw a parallel between himself and Stanton, who has been universally praised for his disinterested heroism.
with death constantly present with them. In some of the cabins the dead were lying unburied, and in many cases the flesh had been cut from them for food.\textsuperscript{29} Ten were already dead, and others were in a dying condition and too weak to eat. So it was thought best to take care of those who were still strong enough to be capable of recovery. The relief party had to guard the provisions from the poor starving souls. They distributed the food here and at the Donner family's camp, which was some distance off, retaining barely enough to supply the returning party. They formed this party of about twenty persons, mostly women and children, choosing those who were strong enough to get over the mountains. Many of the weak cried and begged to go also, but it was impossible to take them. Having passed over the mountains they arrived safely at Sutter's Fort. On the west side they met James F. Reid, with fifteen men, going with provisions to relieve those who from necessity had been left in the camps. Reid and his party were delayed for several days by a severe snow storm, and when they reached the camps they found that three more of the sufferers had died.

Chapter XIII.

As I have stated, after Stanton died his party did not all get safely out of the mountains. They had nearly as bad a time as those who staid at the Donner camps. They got lost and were four days without food, and a fierce snow storm came on. They resolved that one of their number must be killed and his flesh used for food to save the lives of the rest. They cast lots to determine which one should be killed, and it fell upon Pat Dolan. He was a great favorite, and when it came to killing him not one of the party could do it. Just then F. W. Graves, who was of the party, became very sick and felt that he was about to die. He had three [two] daughters with him. He called them and the rest of the company to him and told them that after his death they might eat his flesh; that they must do so or they, also, would surely die; that there would be no impropriety in their doing so, as it was justifiable in order to save their lives.\textsuperscript{30} Another of them, a young man named Foster, and also Mr. Fosdick, died and were eaten. It was a hard case, and a dreadful thing to think of or to do, but I judge it to be justifiable, as it was their only resource,

\textsuperscript{29} Thornton states that the emigrants had not resorted to cannibalism until after the First Relief left, and Daniel Rhoads confirms this in his 1873 memoir; see Morgan, \textit{Overland in 1846}, 329. Riley Moutrey, Harlan's source, was convinced that the opposite was true; see "A Horror Revived," \textit{Santa Cruz Sentinel}, August 31, 1884.

\textsuperscript{30} Farnham referred to Graves's behest obliquely in 1856, McGlashan straightforwardly in 1879.
after having eaten their moccasins and every other animal substance that they could find. While in this condition of hunger Mr. Eddy killed a deer, which was at once completely consumed. They again got into a desperate condition of hunger, when of a sudden they came upon Stanton’s two Indians, as has been stated, and they got out of the snow and were saved.

A fourth relief party afterward crossed to the Donner camps, and found only L. Keeseburg alive. He has been a noted character in connection with these dreadful disasters and sufferings. He was a German by birth; a strong, good-looking man, about six feet high, and when I knew him in his health he weighed about one hundred and eighty pounds. When this last relief arrived they found a horrible state of things. Bodies and parts of bodies in every condition of mutilation and decay lay scattered about. This party was believed to have gone over the mountains as much for gain as for charity to any who might still be surviving. Donner was reputed to be rich, and to have valuable goods in his wagons, and also a considerable sum of money; and it was known that one Halloran, who died on the desert, had left his money to Donner. This party could find no money in any of the cabins or tents. They concluded that the Donner tents had been robbed. Keeseburg was not at the lake camps when the party arrived; but they found his track leading to the Donner camp, and afterward tracked him back to the lake camp. They tried to force him to tell whether he had taken this money, and if so, what he had done with it. With a rope round his neck, they choked him, and threatened to hang him till he was dead, and at last he confessed that Mrs. Donner had intrusted him with $531 in gold and silver, and had charged him to give it to any of her family who might survive.

Chapter XIV.

I kept a hotel in Calistoga, Cal., in 1871. Keeseburg lived close by. I had become well acquainted with him on the way to California, particularly

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31 Johann Ludwig Christian Keseberg, a native of Bad Berleburg, Westphalia, Germany, was thirty years old when he and his wife emigrated to the United States in 1844. Keseberg was educated and intelligent but had a dark side, as Harlan and many others indicate. He confessed to Lienhard that he had a violent temper and several Donner party survivors remembered him as a wifebeater; he was tried for assault in 1856 and 1863; and in an incident reported by Virginia Reed Murphy, he struck a little girl who came to play with his daughters, scarring her for life. Keseberg’s behavior at Donner Lake was suspicious, but nothing can be proven against him. While he did not deserve the opprobrium heaped upon him by his contemporaries, neither does he deserve admiration. Keseberg is a conundrum, and will likely remain one.

32 He was a partner in Sam Brannan’s distillery.
when we were on the "Hastings' Cut-off." At Calistoga we renewed our acquaintance. I saw him, and spoke to him frequently, and had good opportunity to learn whatever he would tell about himself in connection with that Donner camp. He said that when Fallon and his party came to the camp, where he was sole survivor, they treated him from the very first with great cruelty, and as a criminal. Of the whole of that party, Mr. Tucker was the only one who in any way befriended or protected him. He declared to me that the members of this party showed by their actions that they were in pursuit of gain, and had not come from any motive of charity. They obtained many valuable packages of goods from the Donner camp consisting of silks, delaines, and calicoes, besides other things of value. Each man would carry a package a little way, then lay it down, and return for another, and in this way they went over the snow three times. Keeseburg said that in his weak state he could not keep up with them, but generally managed to get to their camp at night. He told me about finding the dead body of his little girl. He was dragging himself along far behind the others, and stopped to rest himself at a place which had been used as a camping-ground by one of the previous relief parties. He had with him some coffee, and having filled his little coffee-pot with snow, he set it on a fire which he had made, and sat waiting for the melted snow to boil. As he sat there he observed a little piece of calico which was uncovered by snow. Half thoughtlessly, partly from idle curiosity, he took hold of the cloth and pulled it. It did not come easily, and he gave it a strong pull. A heavy substance came toward him. It was the dead body of his little girl, who had been taken to cross the mountains by the previous relief party, and had died and been buried in the snow which, having somewhat melted, thus uncovered a part of her dress. This was the first information that he had received of his child's death. His residence in that dreary camp, and the dreadful necessities to which he and others had been reduced, had rendered him callous to death and suffering, but this brought home to him that he was yet a man, and with the affections and weaknesses and responsibilities of a human being.

Another story which he told me was not of so melancholy a character. He said that just as they were getting out of the snow he was sitting alone in camp. All the others were away hunting. He was feeling glad that his escape from his suffering was so near. Of a sudden he was startled by a snuffing, growling noise, and looking around, there was a big grizzly bear within a few feet of him. Keeseburg knew that he was too weak to escape, and so kept perfectly quiet where he sat. He was expecting every moment to be grabbed by the monster, when suddenly there was the sharp report of a rifle and the bear fell dead. Mr. [William M.] Foster, one of the party, had chanced to be returning to camp, and seeing the bear, he had crept up and killed it.

On arriving at Sutter's Fort, some of this party publicly reported Keeseburg had murdered Mrs. Donner. Sutter acted like a friend to him, and
advised him to bring an action against them for slander, which he did, against Fallon, Ned Copymire, and some others. The case was tried before Alcalde Sinclair and a jury, and Keeseburg gained the case, the jury giving him the nominal damages of one dollar.

I have never believed, and I have not known any of the old emigrants to believe, the stories which have been told on this subject. For instance, Fallon's story about his finding in Keeseburg's cabin two kettles full of fresh human blood. He did not attempt to prove this at the trial before Alcalde Sinclair, and how could blood have been taken from the poor, starved, dead bodies? Keeseburg had no cause to murder Mrs. Donner. He had enough to eat without killing her. She had been dead for so much time before Fallon arrived that her blood could not have been fresh, but must have already been coagulated and stale, and her body does not appear to have been in any manner mutilated. Keeseburg told me that she never eat of human flesh, but preferred to die of hunger, although he himself, offered her some, and urged her to eat it to save her life. His being forced to disgorge the $531 was the ugliest thing in his whole conduct, but he assured me that Mrs. Donner had intrusted him with that money, and charged him to deliver it to the surviving members of her family. When I knew Keeseburg on the desert, I observed him to be a man, I may say, of much eccentricity. He kept himself greatly to himself, and his unsociable ways made him unpopular with his fellow emigrants. I have thought him to have been predisposed to derangement of mind, and surely his dreadful suffering and experience at the starved camps might have unsettled almost anyone's mind. When I again became intimate with him, in Calistoga, his mind continually dwelt on the occurrences in that camp. In our conversations he would always recur to them. He looked upon himself as a man predestined to misfortune. He would recall the fact that, in his business relations with Sutter, Brannan, Gen. Vallejo and others, no man could question his honesty and integrity. Several times he had acquired a considerable amount of property, but had lost it by no fault or act of his own.

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33 The reliquefaction of cadaveric blood has been discussed in Thornton, note 113. Contrary to Harlan's statement, Keseberg never denied eating Tamsen Donner's corpse.

34 In 1847 Keseberg had insisted on telling Heinrich Lienhard about the Donner party; see *A Pioneer at Sutter's Fort*, ed. and annotated by Marguerite Eyer Wilbur (Los Angeles: Calafia, 1941), 167–69. Twenty-five years later Keseberg's obsession continued unabated.

35 This may have been true of Keseberg's business relations, but Brannan was known to throw Keseberg's unsavory past up at him in the course of a quarrel; William R. Grimshaw, biographical notes appended to Daniel Rhoads's memoir, Bancroft MS C-D 144.
Once, in Sacramento City, from being rich he was ruined by the great flood, and again, in the same place, he was made a poor man by the fire of 1852, which destroyed nearly the whole of that city.

I have known several men who have become more or less insane from allowing their minds to dwell continually on some one subject—some real or fancied grievance. Such I believe to have been the case with Dr. Powers, whom I will mention hereafter in this book, and I believe that Keeseburg became unsettled in the same way. He said that the treatment which, from the first, he received from Fallon and some of his party made him refuse to tell them anything, till they choked him into it with a rope around his neck. He declared that he would have faithfully executed the trust with which Mrs. Donner encharged him. That he respected her greatly, and never did an evil thing in regard to her. He said she was a true, good woman, and might have got out with one of the first relief parties, but she refused to leave her husband and stayed to die with him. I have never believed in the truth of the terrible charges which were brought against this man, and I know that many of the old emigrants who, perhaps, knew the facts of his case better than myself, would give him the same verdict as myself—Not guilty.36

Chapter XV.

I have several times mentioned Mr. Pyle as “old man Pyle.” He was one of the seniors of our emigrant company.37 He and his family all arrived in California safely. His daughters were among the young ladies with whom we young men used to dance on the prairies, and who enlivened our otherwise tedious journey. His son, Edward, married one of the daughters of Mr. Graves, whom I have previously mentioned. Edward was an intimate friend of mine. The family settled in San José. One day, in looking for a stray mare, he found her in a corral among some horses belonging to a Mexican known as Mariano; at least, I never knew him by any other name. A son of this Mexican [Antonio Valencia] lassoed the horse upon which young Pyle was riding, and threw it down, breaking its leg. The father then told his son to also lasso Pyle and kill him, or they would have to pay for the horse. The young man was mounted, and lassoed Pyle by the neck, starting his horse on the gallop, and dragging Pyle for about a mile toward a small creek that runs into the Guadalupe river. While dragging his victim,

36 While some “old pioneers” may have believed Keseberg innocent, a large number were quite willing to believe him guilty of just about anything.
37 Edward Gantt Pyle, Sr., was born September 22, 1785, in Virginia. He appears to have been a distant relation of Margret Reed.
he looked back and saw the face distorted and the tongue protruding, which horrified him, but he went on, and threw the body into the dry bed of the creek. Then he went and reported what he had done to his father, who went back with him, taking with them a bow and arrows. When they arrived at the place where the young Mexican had thrown the body, they found Pyle alive and sitting on a heap of drift-wood. He begged for his life, but they barbarously murdered and mutilated him, and shot a number of arrows into his dead body—probably to make it appear that Indians had done the deed. The old Mexican died soon after, and thus escaped earthly punishment. The son ran away to Lower California, but his conscience so troubled him that in a few months he returned and confessed the whole matter. He said that the appearance of his victim's countenance never left him by day or night, and he wished to die. He was condemned in Alcalde Burton's court in San José, and hanged; that being, I believe, the first occasion of the infliction of capital punishment in San José.

Another man with whom I became well acquainted during our troubles in the mountains was John Stark. He went from California over to "starved camp" in the same relief party with McCutcheon and Stone, and the old mountaineer, Greenwood. When they got over to the camp they deliberated whether they should stay with the sufferers till another relief party should come, or take those who were able to travel and convey them across the mountains over the snow. All but Stark agreed on the latter course. He refused, and said that he would not abandon those people; that the rest might go if they liked, but he would stay with them. So he alone remained. To him many owed their lives. I think there was no man then in California who possessed the qualities of intelligence, determination, and at the same time, physical strength and courage in the same degree with John Stark. I believe he was stronger than any two of us, and as the common saying is, "he would do to tie to." What he did was done with so much good humor and willingness that his help was doubly agreeable to those who received it. It was said that in passing over the mountain snows he would carry a great part of the provisions and blankets, and sometimes also some of the weaker children. The latter he would take forward a little way, and return for others. He would cheer and encourage them and the rest, and would laugh and say they were so wasted and light that he believed if there was room on his back he could carry them all. While at the camp young James F. Breen's feet had been both frozen and burned, and he and Jonathan Graves, then little boys, were thus carried by Stark the greater part of the way over the mountains. On arriving at Sutter's Fort a surgeon was sought to amputate James' disabled feet. Fortunately for

38 This is one of several versions of Pyle's murder; see also the biographical sketch of Mary Ann Graves, above.
him, no doctor was at hand, and nature and youth effected the cure, in
which, probably, professional skill would have failed.

Stark was of a Virginia family, which settled in Kentucky in Daniel
Boone’s time. In fact, I believe one of his family married a near relative of
that noted pioneer. The family moved over to Wayne county, Indiana,
where John was born in 1817, as was I myself eleven years afterward. Stark
was a large, powerful man, weighing some two hundred and twenty
pounds. He made his California home in Napa county, of which he was
sheriff for several terms, and also represented that county in the state legis­
lature. He died suddenly near Calistoga in 1875 of heart disease. His death
was instantaneous, and occurred when he was at work pitching hay from a
wagon. He left a large family, most or all of whom yet live in that county.
Like Stanton, he was a true hero, and endured all the hardships incident to
the rescue of the sufferers at “starved camp” without being connected by
any family tie with any of them. In fact, I believe he was not even person­
ally acquainted with any of them until he rendered them that great service.

Probably about twenty members of the Reid and Donner party yet sur­
vive. James F. Reid lived in San José, where he was much respected till his
death, on Nov 24th, 1874. His wife died at the same place on July 24th,
1861. 39

In dismissing this matter of the “starved camp” tragedy, I cannot but
again advert to the fact that if Reid and Donner had stayed with Mr. Pyle
and my uncle, and helped us to make the road through Weber cañon, they
would have got through in safety, and both they and we, by arriving at the
mountains so many days earlier, would have escaped many other troubles
which afflicted us. Hastings was not to blame in this. 40 He told Reid and
Donner that he did not know the route which they wished to take, having
never been over it. The blunder of all of us lay in our leaving the Fort Hall
road, which was a well known and an easier route, and this is an illustra­
tion of the truth of the adage,

“While you have a highway
never take a bye way,
E’en tho’ it be a nigh way.”

39 Harlan’s version of Starved Camp is much confused when compared with other
sources, but the information about Stark and the Reeds is from McGlashan.
Harlan has garbled McGlashan’s dates, however; Margret Reed died on No­
vember 25, 1861, James Reed on July 24, 1874.

40 Except for Thornton, early Donner party sources hardly mention Hastings, let
alone blame him. After about 1930 it became fashionable to see the disaster as
Hastings’s fault; although this oversimplification is untenable, his irresponsible
promotion of an untried cutoff was a significant factor in the deaths of more
than forty people and in the sufferings of many others.