Disaster At The Colorado

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Volume after volume has been written about the Oregon-California Trail and other overland routes to California, but comparatively little has been written about Beale’s Wagon Road. The reason is simple: The disaster suffered by the first emigrant parties who attempted this route discouraged its use. In later years as Route 66, and more recently as Interstate 40, it would become a major east-west highway, but it took the development of the automobile to bring this about. The first wagon train to attempt Beale’s Wagon Road was the Rose-Baley wagon train in 1858. The hardships and suffering endured by these hardy and courageous pioneers have seldom been equaled in the annals of our nation’s westward frontier movement; yet their story remains largely untold. The purpose of this narrative is to tell their story.

My great grandparents, William Right Baley and Nancy Baley, their children, and my great-great uncle, Gillum Baley, his wife Permelia, and their children, were members of this unfortunate wagon train. As a child I heard a few tales about their overland trip from my father and his relatives, but over time, many of the details of their ill-fated adventure had been forgotten. While researching my genealogy, I came upon bits of information about their harrowing journey across the western plains. This piqued my interest and motivated me to learn more.

An undertaking of this nature could not have been accomplished without the aid of many generous and cooperative individuals to whom I am deeply indebted. Many went out of their way to lend a helping hand. Some, who had no knowledge of their own to contribute, nevertheless made a valuable contribution by providing me with the names of persons who were knowledgeable. Much valuable information was gained in this manner. And, as with any project, there were those who promised much but delivered little.
A survey of the literature revealed only one known journal kept by a member of this emigrant party. That was the journal keep by John Udell. Without this little book, many of the details of the Rose-Baley wagon train would probably never be known. I wish he could have been a little more informative about the interrelationships between the various members of the group; nevertheless, the facts given by this old Baptist preacher were of great value in my research. Udell provided the names of those families who comprised this emigrant party and he provided information on where each family departed from, thus furnishing a starting point for locating descendants. Udell provided the basic framework; my task was to fill in the details.

One of the first descendants that I was able to locate was Dr. Joel W. Hedgpeth of Santa Rosa, California. Dr. Hedgpeth, an oceanographer of considerable fame, is a great grandson of Joel and Jane Hedgpeth, who were in this wagon train. Dr. Hedgpeth was very helpful in providing details about the Hedgpeth family as well as providing documents and photographs. He was also kind enough to give me the name of another researcher of the Rose-Baley wagon train, Mark S. Simpson Jr., of Pittsburg, California. I discovered that Mark was a great grandson of William Right Baley and a distant cousin of mine. Mark had done some preliminary research on the Rose-Baley wagon train, but ill health forced him to discontinue. He kindly lent me the results of his research and urged me to continue the work. Unfortunately, Mark passed away before I completed the project. To Mark S. Simpson Jr., I will always be grateful.

My next step was to pay a visit to the areas where much of the story took place: Arizona and New Mexico. In Kingman, Arizona, my wife and I visited the Mojave Museum of History and Arts. Here we learned that a man by the name of Jack Beale Smith of Flagstaff, Arizona, (not related to Edward F. Beale) was a student of Beale’s Wagon Road and had discovered and mapped most of the original road between Zuni, New Mexico, and the Colorado River. He has written several booklets on Beale’s Wagon Road and related subjects. We spent two days with Jack in his jeep going over sections of the road which can only be reached by travel in a four-wheel drive vehicle. Finding Jack was a real stroke of luck.

From Bob White, sheriff of the Garden of the Sun Corral, Westerners International, I received several helpful suggestions for
which I am grateful. Bob is a native of Arizona and a student of Arizona history.

Another researcher to whom I am deeply grateful is Dennis G. Casebier of Goffs, (near Needles) California. Dennis’s field of expertise is the Mojave Road. He is the author of a book by that name in addition to several other books dealing with the early-day history of the American presence along the lower Colorado River. The Mojave Road was an extension of Beale’s Wagon Road from the Colorado River to San Bernardino and Los Angeles. Dennis is very knowledgeable about Beale’s Wagon Road and the Rose-Baley wagon train. He gave me much information and encouragement. He also read my manuscript and offered valuable advice which resulted in many improvements.

To Willetta Pokorny of Clovis, California, I am deeply indebted for much of the information on the Gillum Baley family, including photographs, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, and other documents. Willetta is a great granddaughter of Gillum Baley.

Much of the information on the Brown family and Sallie Fox came from Gloria Kidder and Shawn Lum from the staff of the Harbison House and the Nut Tree in Vacaville, California. Leona Crownover, a direct descendant of Sallie Fox Allen, also provided me with much useful material and photographs. From Dorthy Kupcha Leland, the author of Sallie Fox: The Story of a Pioneer Girl, I received moral support as well as some excellent photographs. From Dr. Genevieve Thompson, a descendant of Sophia Frances (Franc) Fox, I received photographs and genealogical material on this branch of the family. To all of these individuals, I give my deepest thanks.

For details on the life of John Udell, I am indebted to C. Melvin Bliven, a descendant of John and Emily Udell. He provided me with a photograph of John and Emily as well as a genealogy of the Udell family. In researching the Daly and Holland families, I was most fortunate in finding the late Hart Ralph Tambs, a descendant and unofficial historian of these families. I also received much help in collecting data and photographs on these families from Dorothy Wilbur of Waterford, California. Ever try finding a person by the name of Smith? This can be a daunting task, especially when the only bits of information available were the subject’s initials and the general area in which he probably settled. Thanks to Dorothy DeDontney of the Santa Clara County
Historical and Genealogical Society, this task was made simple. She found a recent obituary of a descendant of E. O. Smith which listed the names of next of kin. From this list she provided me the name and address of Terry Feist, a great-great grandson of E.O. Smith. Terry kindly provided me with a copy of a memorial sketch of E. O. Smith which was published in the *San Jose Mercury* on March 12, 1892. The sketch proved to be a valuable source of information on the life of E. O. Smith.

The following historical societies played an important part in my research: Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona; Fresno City and County Historical Society, Fresno, California; Mohave County Historical Society, Kingman, Arizona; Santa Clara County Historical and Genealogical Society; State Historical Society of Iowa; Tulare County Historical Society; and the Van Buren County, Iowa, Historical Society.

Libraries, museums, and archives were also important sources of information. The Huntington Library and Art Gallery in San Marino, California, played a major role in my research. My special thanks to Peter J. Blodgett, Assistant Curator, Western Historical Manuscripts, for his help. While on the subject of the Huntington Library, I would like to thank John E. Osborne, former sheriff of the Garden of the Sun Corral, Westerners International, of Fresno, California, for his assistance in helping me in obtaining a reader’s card at the Huntington Library. His assistance made access much easier.

Other individuals and institutions that I wish to thank are: The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California; The California State Library, Sacramento, California; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Family History Department, Salt Lake City, Utah; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Fresno Stake, Family History Library, Fresno, California; Fresno County Library, Fresno, California; Henry Madden Library, California State University, Fresno, California; General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church, Madison, New Jersey; Ruth Ann Hager, Genealogical Researcher, Florissant, Missouri; Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections, University of the Pacific Libraries, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California; the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Missouri West Conference Archives, Central Methodist College, Fayette, Missouri; National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Rose Ann Tompkins, Chandler, Arizona; Tulare City
Library, Tulare, California; Tulare County Recorder, Visalia, California. For helping me to master my fear of the computer, I am indebted to Gayle E. Jordan. Without her calm assurance I don’t believe that I would ever have conquered the beast!

For the tedious work of proofreading I am indebted to Bobbye Sisk Temple, Doris Hall, and Dorothy Cufaude. They wore out several red pencils while performing the task.

Last, but by no means the least, my wife, Mary, who accompanied me on field trips, corrected my grammar, and offered suggestions for improvement. Without her patience and encouragement this work would have been impossible.

If I have omitted anyone, the omission was not intentional, but simply an oversight by the author.