Disaster At The Colorado

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Chapter 1

The Roster

“I thought it was preposterous to start on so long a journey with so many women and helpless children, and so many dangers attending the attempt.”

This is how John Udell described the decision of his fellow travelers to leave the old established road and follow a new and completely untested and unproven route that promised to get them to California a few days sooner. But the lure of shorter routes and cutoffs often proved irresistible to emigrants, as it did with Udell’s companions.

Udell and his wife, Emily, were members of a California-bound wagon train from Iowa and Missouri that had arrived at Albuquerque, New Mexico, in June of 1858. Here, they heard about a newly surveyed road (Beale’s Wagon Road) that would run from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to San Bernardino, California. The proposed road at that time was little more than a survey trail, traveled previously only by a few experienced and well-equipped explorers. Some day it would become a major east-west highway. But the time was not yet.

Udell’s fellow travelers were a diverse group with little in common other than a desire to establish new homes for themselves and their families in California. Emigrant trains crossing the western plains were usually named after the largest or the wealthiest property owner, or owners, in the group. That is probably why this emigrant party would become known as the Rose-Baley wagon train, after its two wealthiest members, Leonard John Rose and Gillum Baley, although some of its members might have objected to this name. The two companies, the Roses and the Baleys, did not start the journey together but joined along the way, a common practice as there was greater safety in large numbers.
Leonard John Rose, better known as L. J. Rose, was by far the wealthiest member of this group. He was thirty years of age, and a resident of Van Buren County, Iowa. Traveling with him was his wife, Amanda, age twenty-five, and their two children, Nina Elizabeth and Annie Wilhelmina, ages four and one. Also traveling with the Rose family were Mrs. Rose’s father and mother, Ezra M. Jones, age fifty-five, and Elizabeth Burgett Jones, age fifty-four, and the Joneses’ eighteen-year-old son, Edward C. Jones. All were from Van Buren County.

L. J. Rose was born in Rottenburg, Germany, on May 1, 1827. When he was eight years old, he immigrated to the United States with his mother and sister. The father had come to this country sometime previously and was operating a small store in New Orleans. After a short stay in New Orleans the family moved to Waterloo, Illinois, where they purchased another store. The younger Rose finished school in Waterloo and attended one year at Shurtleff College in Alton, Illinois. He then returned to Waterloo and went into business with his father.

Father and son did not get along well together in business; the elder Rose was slow in becoming Americanized and held onto his old country ways, while the son, with an American education, had a better understanding of American merchandising methods. The two quarreled frequently until, finally, the younger Rose could take no more and left the business to strike out on his own. He invested his share of the money from the partnership in apples, which he packed in barrels and freighted down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, where he quickly sold the consignment at a favorable price. Looking around for an opportunity to reinvest his money, he observed that there was an oversupply of draft animals in Louisiana, and they were selling at a much lower price than what they would have sold for on the Illinois market. He bought all the horses and mules his funds would allow, then shipped them up the Mississippi River to his home in Illinois, where he sold the animals for a substantial profit. He repeated this process until he had saved enough money to open a small store of his own.¹

In 1841, at the age of twenty-one, Rose moved to Keosauqua, Iowa, where he purchased a general store. Here, he met Amanda Markel Jones whom he married in 1851. By 1857, through hard work, good luck, and excellent management, the young man accumulated a
sizable bank account. With things going so well for him, one might wonder why he wanted to pull up stakes and move himself and his family halfway across the continent to a place he knew nothing about. Rose supplied the answer to this question in an article he wrote in 1892 for a magazine, *The Californian*:

> In 1858 some miners who had just returned from California, so fired my imagination with descriptions of its glorious climate, wealth of flowers and luscious fruits, that I was inspired with an irresistible desire to experience in person the delights to be found in the land of plenty.²

After selling most of his property and settling his debts, Rose had a net worth of more than $30,000, a small fortune in those days. With this substantial sum of money he was able to put together one of the best-equipped outfits ever to travel the western plains. He purchased a herd of 200 of the best cattle on the market, mostly thoroughbred Red Durhams.³ He knew he could sell these animals in California for a hefty profit. For driving the loose stock, and for scouting and hunting, he purchased twenty of the finest horses that he could find in Iowa and Missouri, including a Morgan stallion, Black Morrill, valued at $2,500, and two matched Morgan fillies valued at $350 each. To manage this huge herd of livestock, and to perform the myriad duties of camp life, he obtained the services of seventeen young single men. For the most part these young men were grubstakers, receiving no salary or other compensation for their services other than their board. This was a common method of getting to California and other Western states for young single men who lacked the funds for purchasing and fitting out teams and wagons of their own.

To oversee this extensive outfit, Rose hired a man by the name of Alpha Brown, a forty-five-year-old fellow Van Buren County resident. Brown was to act as general manager and to have charge of the day-to-day affairs, while Rose would act as chairman of the board and take care of the more serious matters. Alpha Brown was well qualified for the job, having been to California during the gold rush in 1849. Dame Fortune, as she had with so many other forty-niners, failed to smile upon him, and he returned to his family in Iowa a poorer but a wiser person. Brown was a man of sterling character, greatly respected by all who knew him. He possessed considerable experience in the handling of
horses and cattle, a skill of great value for managing a California-bound wagon train. Rose considered himself fortunate in having secured the services of such a competent and experienced individual.

Brown planned to bring along his family, consisting of his wife, Mary Baldwin Fox Brown, age thirty-five; their seven-year-old daughter, Julia; their five-year-old son, Orrin; and Brown’s invalid daughter, Relief (Liefy), age thirteen, from his previous marriage. Mrs. Brown also had two daughters from her previous marriage, Sophia Frances (Franc) Fox, age fifteen, and Sarah (Sallie) Estelle Fox, age thirteen.

For carrying the passengers and the necessary supplies and equipment needed for such an extended trip, Rose purchased four large prairie schooner-type wagons, each with high sideboards and covered by a heavy painted canvas. Two barrels of water were secured to one side while feedboxes for feeding the animals were attached to the other side and to the rear. Three yoke of oxen (six animals) were required to pull these stout but ponderous vehicles. Oxen, although slower than horses or mules, were the preferred power source for pulling the heavy wagons because they had greater endurance and stamina and required less care than either horses or mules. Three of these prairie schooners were used for carrying equipment and supplies, while the fourth was used by the Alpha Brown family. The driver, sometimes referred to as a bullwhacker, usually controlled the oxen by walking at their left side rather than riding in the wagon as did stagecoach drivers. For transporting his own family and his in-laws, Rose purchased an old ambulance pulled by two mules. It was light but fast and was jokingly called the “avalanche” by one of the young wags in the party. It was usually in the lead when the procession got underway each morning.4

Emigrants traveling to California or Oregon from the Midwest usually went by way of the Oregon-California Trail since this was the shortest route for them. In 1858, however, the United States was having a problem with the Mormons in Utah that threatened to lead to hostilities. This was the so-called Mormon, or Utah, war of 1857–58.5 Fearing possible conflict with the Mormons, many emigrants that year were fearful of traveling this route. Some chose to avoid Mormon territory by taking the Santa Fe Trail to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and from there traveling the Southern Route through the southern part of the New
Mexico Territory to California. There were several variants of this route, but they all came together before crossing the Colorado River into California at Fort Yuma. This road was considerably longer than the Oregon-California Trail, but many emigrants in 1858, including the Rose company, believed that this was the safest overland route to California.

The Rose company left Van Buren County, Iowa, in early April of 1858. They set their course for Westport (present-day Kansas City, Missouri), where they crossed the Missouri River by steamboat. Shortly before arriving at Westport they were joined by another family by the name of Bentner. This family consisted of seven people: a husband and wife, a daughter of about eighteen, another daughter about fifteen, a son about twelve, and two younger children whose gender and ages are unrecorded. Like Rose, the Bentners were also German immigrants. Although well-Anglicized, they were usually referred to as the Dutch Family by other members of the wagon train. Little is known about this family. Even their first names are not recorded in any known accounts of the journey. German immigrants in those days were frequently lumped together with the Dutch, probably because of the similarities of the languages and the fact that the German word for themselves is Deutsch, which sounded like Dutch to the American ear.

The Bentner family was traveling light; their outfit consisted of a single small wagon pulled by a team of mules. They were driving no loose livestock, not even an extra pair of mules.

In Putnam County, Missouri, just across the Iowa-Missouri state line, John and Emily Udell were also making plans for an overland journey to California. At ages sixty-two and sixty-four, they were considerably older than most emigrants on the trail. They were the parents of eight grown children. Two of their sons, Oliver and Henry, were living in Solano County, California. Feeling the twinges of old age, and not having accumulated much in the way of worldly goods, the Udells wanted to be near their two sons in California, who they hoped might be able to assist their parents during their twilight years. John Udell had tried earning a living in several different fields including mining, farming, bookselling, and preaching (he was a lay Baptist minister), but with little success in any of these endeavors.

For John Udell, this trip would not be a new experience, for he had been to California three times, the first in 1850 during the height.
of the gold rush. The big nuggets had eluded him, but this didn’t dis-
courage him from trying his luck twice more with equally poor results.

Thanks to John Udell, many of the details of the Rose-Baley wagon train have been preserved for posterity. He faithfully kept a journal in which he recorded each day’s activities for nearly the entire journey. Others in the group might also have kept diaries or jour-

nals, but if so, they have not come to light. Udell kept journals dur-

ing his previous trips to California, and in 1856 he was successful in 
having one published under the title, *Incidents of Travel Across the Great Plains*. The book was not a big financial success, but it did bring him some favorable attention. He very likely had publication in mind when he started his journal at the beginning of the Rose-Baley trip. As a published author, and having made three prior trips to California, Udell considered himself quite an authority on western travel, an opinion which would bring him into conflict with others during the course of the journey.

For this venture Udell prepared well. He equipped himself with 
a good wagon, an excellent team of four yoke of well-broken oxen, 
two good milch cows, a good riding horse, and everything needed to 
make this trip as comfortable as possible. He hired ( or more likely 
grubstaked) two young men, Tamerlane Davis and John Anspach, to 
take care of the team and perform all the necessary labor during the

day process. Udell knew what was needed to make the trip a success.

The Udells started their journey to California on April 8, 
1858. They traveled at a leisurely pace across northern Missouri, stop-
ing frequently to say goodbye to friends along the way and, wher-
ever possible, having a meal with them. They were usually able to 
spend each night at a friend’s house, sometimes laying over for an 
extra day. Udell seems to have had a lot of friends in Putnam and 
neighboring counties.

The first day they traveled ten miles and put up with a neigh-
bor, a Mr. William Graham. The next day, Udell recorded, “We took 
dinner [lunch] at Mr. John Daily’s [John Lucas Daly] in Yreka. We 
expect Mr. Daily with his large family, will overtake us at the Missouri 
River, and travel with us to California. We traveled fifteen miles today 
and camped near Mr. Herriman’s.” The Dalys were obviously close 
friends of the Udells, probably members of the same church. The Dalys
were not quite ready to begin the trip to California, but knowing the slow pace of the Udells, the Dalys knew they would have no trouble overtaking them.

On April 23, 1858, the Udells arrived at Westport, where, for a two-dollar fee, they crossed the Missouri River by steamboat and arrived in the Kansas Territory. Because it was getting late in the day, they traveled only a short distance before establishing camp. They remained at this location until April 26, on which date Udell recorded, “We moved out four miles, to the encampment of a friend from Keosauqua, Iowa, consisting of fifteen men and a number of women and children. Mr. J. L. [L. J.] Rose was the proprietor, and Alpha Brown superintended it. I made arrangements to travel with this company, as they were bound for California. We all agreed to travel the Santa Fe Route, through New Mexico.” This statement indicates Udell may have known Rose previously.

After spending three days in camp with the Rose company getting organized, the emigrants resumed their westward journey on April 30, 1858. “Our course lay through Kansas Territory, over a beautiful rolling prairie, of rich soil; eight miles to Indian Creek; thence ten miles to Cedar Creek—well wooded. Here we camped. To-day Mr. Dailey [Daly] with his large family, and his son-in-law, Isaac Holland and family, overtook us, and will travel with us.” The Rose company of the Rose-Baley wagon train was now complete, although this was not the way the two companies would be constituted later in the journey.

The Daly family consisted of John Lucas Daly, a farmer from Putnam County, Missouri, age forty-eight; his wife, Irene Morrow Daly, age forty-three; and six children, ranging in ages from nine to twenty-two. Also traveling with the Dalys were their married daughter, Amanda Melvina Holland, age twenty-seven; her husband, Isaac Taylor Holland, age twenty-six, and their four children, Hiram H., age four; Edward Warren, age two; and one-year-old twin boys, Tom and John. Isaac Taylor Holland was a blacksmith by trade, a most useful person to have along on a wagon train.\(^8\)

John Lucas Daly was born in Bourbon County, Kentucky, November 2, 1809. His wife, Irene Morrow Daly, was born in Kentucky in 1814. They were married in Boone County, Missouri, in 1829. Their eldest daughter, Amanda Melvina, married Isaac Taylor Holland in
Putnam County, Missouri, in 1853. Holland was born in Davidson County, Tennessee, February 21, 1832.

The Dalys and Hollands each had an ox-drawn wagon and a few spare oxen, a couple of riding horses, and perhaps a milch cow or two. They were not burdened by a large number of loose stock like some families in this wagon train. Their destination was Tuolumne County, where Isaac had three brothers living. They had written to Isaac praising the delightful climate of California, and enumerating all the other glories that abounded there. They urged Isaac to bring his family and come out west and join them.

John Lucas Daly had been to California in 1849 during the gold rush and mined on the Feather River. Although he failed to find his fortune, he still believed there were a lot of nuggets in the streams of California just waiting to be picked up. He, too, might have had relatives in Tuolumne County.

During the spring of 1858, four families in northwest Missouri were also making preparations to emigrate to California. These were the two Baley and the two Hedgpeth families. All were farmers in Nodaway County, Missouri. Since Gillum Baley was, by tacit agreement, the acknowledged leader of the group, these families will be referred to as the Baley company.

Gillum Baley, age forty-four, was the older of the two brothers. His wife, Permelia was thirty-eight. They were the parents of nine children ranging from age twenty down to a six-week-old babe. William Right Baley, the younger brother, was thirty-eight; his wife, Nancy, was also thirty-eight. They had eight children whose ages varied from sixteen years to fifteen months. In addition, Nancy was five months pregnant with child number nine.

Gillum Baley was born June 19, 1813, in Gallatin County, Illinois, near the Ohio River. When he was but two years old, the family resettled in Madison County, Missouri, where his father, William Baley, was one of the early farmers and cattle raisers of southeastern Missouri. In 1826 the family moved to Sangamon County, Illinois. After a brief residence there, the family moved again, this time to Pike County, Illinois.

They were living in Pike County in 1832 when trouble broke out between the settlers and the Sauk and Fox Indians in an affair
known to history as the Black Hawk War. Gillum and his older brother, Caleb, enlisted in the Illinois Mounted Militia in General Whiteside’s brigade. Another volunteer in this brigade, but in a different regiment, was a young man by the name of Abraham Lincoln. Gillum Baley, although only nineteen, was elected second sergeant of his company. The company had a complement of four sergeants. After the expiration of his enlistment, he returned home to Pike County where he married Catherine Decker in 1834. Catherine died of measles after only two years of marriage, leaving Gillum with an infant son, William Moses. Shortly after this tragic event, Gillum left Illinois and resettled in Jackson County, Missouri. Here he married his second wife, Permelia Eleanor Myers, on August 21, 1836.

William Right Baley, called Right (spelled without a W) by his family and friends, was born May 17, 1819, in Madison County, Missouri. He was too young to enlist in the Black Hawk War with his brothers, Caleb and Gillum. In 1836 he joined Gillum and other family members in Jackson County, Missouri. Two years later the families moved to Platte County, Missouri, one of the new counties formed from territory acquired from the Sauk and Fox Indians in 1836 by the Platte Purchase. In 1842 the extended family resettled in Nodaway County, another of the counties created from the Platte Purchase. While living in Platte County, William Right married Nancy Margaret Funderburk. Nancy was born in Davidson County, Tennessee on March 20, 1820, a daughter of George Funderburk Sr. and Sally Scott.

In 1849, the three brothers, Caleb, Gillum, and William Right, got caught up in the excitement of the gold rush. They left their farms in the care of their wives and headed to California by way of the Oregon-California Trail. Caleb died in the gold mines at the Feather River soon after their arrival, but the two remaining brothers continued their mining activities with varying degrees of success until 1852, when they returned to their homes in Missouri by way of the Isthmus of Panama.

After returning home to Nodaway County, the brothers continued farming and improving their herds of thoroughbred Durham cattle, but the pleasant memories of California beckoned them. In 1858, they decided to return, this time with their families. They planned to drive their cattle with them; this would be their grubstake when they arrived at their new homes.
The Hedgpeth families consisted of a father and a married son and their wives and children. In the elder Hedgpeth household were Joel Hedgpeth Sr., age forty-nine; his wife, Jane, fifty; and their four children, varying in ages from twenty to seven years old. The members of the younger Hedgpeth family were Thomas Riley Hedgpeth, eldest son of Joel and Jane, age twenty-eight; his wife, Eliza Jane Elliott Hedgpeth, twenty-four; and their four children ranging in age from seven years to nine months.\textsuperscript{13}

Joel Hedgpeth Sr. was born in Kentucky on January 14, 1809. His wife Jane Hudspeth (she may have been a distant cousin) was born in Virginia in 1808. They were married in Green County, Kentucky, in 1829. We know little about their early lives except that, like many other families of that era, they moved to northern Missouri during the 1830s. In 1836, Joel was employed as a teamster in Jackson County, Missouri, by the firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, the largest transportation company in the West at that time.\textsuperscript{14} During the early 1840s they settled in Nodaway County, Missouri.\textsuperscript{15}

The Baleys and Hedgpeths were neighbors and fellow members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in Nodaway County, Missouri. This is likely how they met. Both Gillum Baley and Joel Hedgpeth Sr. had studied law and both had served as justices of the peace in Nodaway County, although neither ever obtained a law degree.\textsuperscript{16} Obviously, these four families had a lot in common and were compatible, a positive factor considering the ordeals that they were soon to endure. None of the Hedgpeths had previously been to California, and so far as it is known, they had no close relatives living there. They, too, had heard the tall tales spun by returning miners about the wonders of California, and they believed that a better life awaited them there. They also planned to drive their livestock with them to California.

Another factor that may have encouraged these families to leave Missouri in 1858 was the unsettling times that existed on the Missouri-Kansas border as the result of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. This legislation admitted Nebraska into the Union as a free territory, but provided for the people of the Kansas Territory to decide for themselves whether they wanted to be organized as a free or as a slave territory. The result was what might have
been expected—open warfare between proslavery and antislavery forces—with each side trying desperately to organize the territory to suit its own political convictions. Ruffians and other undesirable characters moved into the area to take advantage of the strife.

Conditions were exacerbated when John Brown and his abolitionists moved into Kansas. The Territory became known as Bleeding Kansas, so great was the violence. Soon the conflict began to spill over the border into the western counties of Missouri, including Nodaway, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. To make matters worse, the Panic of 1857 placed financial burdens on farmers everywhere in the country, but it was particularly hard on those in the Midwest. It was a combination of these factors plus the exaggerated glories of California that persuaded these families to pull up stakes and emigrate.

The Baleys and Hedgpeths said goodbye to their friends, relatives, and neighbors in Nodaway County on April 22, 1858, and set their course for St. Joseph, Missouri. After some last-minute shopping in St. Joseph (the elder Hedgpeths had their pictures taken here), they crossed the Missouri River on a steamboat and entered the Kansas Territory.

The Baley outfit consisted of five Murphy wagons, nineteen yoke of oxen (thirty-eight animals), twenty thoroughbred Durham cows and heifers, one thoroughbred Durham bull, and an unrecorded number of riding horses. The Hedgpeth outfit consisted of three Murphy wagons, twelve yoke of oxen (twenty-four animals), fifteen milch cows, forty head of loose cattle, and three riding horses. In addition, each family had “an outfit for crossing the plains,” consisting of a supply of food, clothing, and all the paraphernalia needed for such a long journey. Both the Baleys and the Hedgpeths made room in their crowded wagons for small libraries.

To herd the loose stock, and perform the myriad duties connected with a trip of this nature, six to ten young men (the exact number is unknown) were hired or grubstaked jointly by the two families. One of these young men was a German immigrant by the name of August Block who was hired as a wheelwright, an indispensable person for a wagon train. Another German immigrant hired for the trip was a carpenter by the name of William Krug. We will hear more about these two later.
Other young men who accompanied the Baley train, as identified by the affidavits that they signed in support of the Baley and Hedgpeth Indian depredation suits, were: William Garton, John and Thomas Billings, and Wesley Gadsbury. There may have been three or four others whose names are not recorded.

Gillum Baley, having spent his entire life on the western frontier, was well suited for leading a wagon train across the plains. He was forty-four years of age, old enough to possess mature judgment, yet young enough to still have the physical stamina necessary for such a demanding endeavor. Having served as a justice of the peace and as a lay minister, he had demonstrated his ability to work in harmony with others. In addition to these virtues, he had also been to California during the gold rush and had experienced firsthand the rigors of crossing the plains. His brief service in the Black Hawk War gave him at least a modicum of military discipline and some knowledge of fighting Indians. He was known to be an expert shot with a rifle, a skill which would soon come in handy. These qualities, combined with a hardy constitution and an optimistic outlook on life, proved Gillum Baley to be a worthy counterpart to the younger but less experienced Rose as co-leader of the Rose-Baley wagon train.

By 1858, there was nothing new or unusual about emigrating to California. Americans had been doing this since the early 1840s. What was different about this emigrant party was the route they chose and what happened to them while traveling this route.