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Chapter 8

A Cold Miserable Winter

Town citizens and the army did everything in their power to ease the emigrants’ suffering after their arrival back in Albuquerque. Some of this outpouring of good will was no doubt motivated by guilty feelings on the part of the army and the local citizenry for having encouraged these emigrants to travel Beale’s uncompleted wagon road; nevertheless, this aid was a godsend to the weary, starving survivors.

The army issued a soldier’s ration daily to each person, including children, for a period of thirty days. This was no trifling gesture when one remembers the great distance from which most supplies had to come. These rations consisted mostly of flour, salt pork, bacon, jerky, sugar, and coffee—nothing gourmet, but these everyday foods were a big treat for people who had been eating nothing but the flesh of starving cattle. The bachelor officers and others without families on the post voluntarily gave up their quarters to those sufferers who lacked shelter. The army employed many of the men as teamsters and herders, while the townspeople contributed clothing, blankets, items of furniture, money, and whatever else they could spare to lessen the privations of these unfortunates.

Of the returning travelers, the Udells were the most fortunate, for on the outward journey Udell struck up an acquaintance with Judge Samuel Winslow, a man of considerable wealth and influence in Albuquerque. This friendship now paid off handsomely. Word of the disaster at the Colorado River had preceded the emigrants back to Albuquerque. Judge Winslow and his wife, having heard about the plight of the wagon train, prepared a comfortable room in their own spacious home for the Udells. They fed them from their own table and provided them with garments from Winslow’s clothing store. Udell
was properly grateful for this assistance, for he recorded in his journal, “Such benevolence and hospitality will, I trust, be rewarded by that great and good Being who rewards all according to their works.”

The Udells remained as house guests of the Winslows until November 23. On that date Udell wrote, “I have engaged to herd and feed the government beef cattle, for fifteen dollars per month and a soldier’s rations of provision.” Winslow, a sutler for the army, might have used his influence in securing a job for Udell. With a promise of employment, Udell was able to rent a comfortable room in town for himself and Emily. “We thought that with this we could support ourselves through the winter, and not trespass on Mr. Winslow’s hospitality any longer,” Udell recorded. The good citizens of Albuquerque donated a few housekeeping articles to make the Udells a little more comfortable. Some of the army officers also helped by donating money. Udell specifically mentions money donations from Captain John Trevett, Major G. H. Fry and his lady, and Colonel D. S. Miles and his lady; enlisted personnel also helped with donations of money. “Sergeant Morrison and Private Haywood made me a present of five dollars each, in cash,” wrote Udell. Considering that a private’s pay at that time was only eleven dollars per month, this was a significant amount. Soon after the Udells moved into their room, Emily became quite ill. Udell remained by her bedside and was unable to start his job as a herder for the army. Udell records that Mrs. Winslow was very attentive to Emily, as were the daughters of Gillum Baley. His journal entry for November 24, stated, “My wife considered dangerous,” and for November 25, he again reported, “My companion is no better.” For the next two days he continued to report no improvement, “My dear wife is no better; may the Lord bless the means for her recovery. “But for November 28, he had good news to report: “My companion is much better, thanks be to God for mercy and favor.” And in the next two days, more good news: “My wife’s health improving slowly.”

For December 1, Udell reported: “I commenced herding government stock, employed by Commissary Hannon, at fifteen dollars per month, and a soldier’s rations of provisions.” He is silent about his friends, the John Lucas Daly and Isaac Taylor Holland families, but they might have been among the families who were quartered by the army that winter. Edward Warren Holland, in his autobiography, states that
his father, Isaac Taylor Holland, obtained employment as a blacksmith at one of the army posts. He doesn’t say what his grandfather, John Lucas Daly, did that winter in Albuquerque, but since Daly was known to be an experienced teamster, it is probable that he also was employed as a teamster by the army.

Rose was another of the more fortunate emigrants. Although he had suffered the heaviest financial loss, he still had a little money left. He rented a small adobe for his extended family (his own family and his in-laws, the Joneses) in Albuquerque, then began looking around for some type of business that he might acquire with a minimum down payment, but he was unable to find anything. To conserve what was left of his dwindling bankroll, he started searching for employment commensurate with his abilities. None of those teamster or herder jobs for him! According to his son, L. J. Rose Jr., the only job his father could find was as a waiter at one of the local restaurants. It was menial labor and far below his expectations, but it did offer him an opportunity to learn something about the restaurant business without investing any money.

It didn’t take long for Rose to tire of waiting tables, and as soon as he had saved a little money he left Albuquerque and moved to Santa Fe. He had formed a very favorable impression of Santa Fe on the outbound trip. He believed that it had much more to offer in the way of business opportunities than did Albuquerque. Since he could find no suitable housing, he moved his family into a tent on the outskirts of town and began making inquiries with real estate agents about local business ventures. He soon learned that one of the principal hotels in town, The Exchange Hotel (formerly the U. S. Hotel) was on the market. The down payment, however, was considerably more than his meager bankroll. Not one to let a good business opportunity slip through his fingers, Rose wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, Harvey K. S. O’Melveny, asking him for a loan to cover the balance of the down payment. O’Melveny was a prosperous young attorney in Cairo, Illinois. He promptly forwarded the necessary funds enabling Rose to purchase the Exchange hotel. Rose called his hotel simply La Fonda (la fonda means an inn, tavern, or boarding house in Spanish). A luxurious La Fonda Hotel occupies the same site today.
Santa Fe at that time had the reputation of being a wide-open town with gambling and prostitution running rampant. La Fonda was a rundown, one-story, flat-roofed adobe, but it was favorably located near the plaza in the center of town. It was not the hotel part of La Fonda that appealed to Rose, according to his son, L. J. Rose Jr., but rather the bar and gambling business. The son describes his father as a first-rate poker and seven-up player. Although managing the enterprise required most of his time and effort, Rose would occasionally engage in high-stake poker games, usually with very profitable results. Whether it was entrepreneurial skill, or just good luck, Rose’s venture in the hotel business was a big success. When he sold La Fonda shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War, he realized a net profit of $14,000 after paying off all debts. In a period of a little more than one year, Rose had recouped almost half of the loss he had suffered at the hands of the Mojave Indians at the Colorado River. After closing his business dealings in Santa Fe, Rose moved to southern California where Lady Luck continued to smile on him.

Fate was not as kind to the other emigrants as she had been to Udell and Rose. The condition of one group is perhaps best expressed by the petition that Gillum and William Right Baley filed with Congress for reimbursement of their losses to the Mojave Indians. The concluding paragraph of their petition reads as follows:

Your petitioners further state they are now in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with their families in a destitute situation, unable to procure work or means to proceed on the Southern Route to California or go back to Missouri, and they are now living in the houses and on the bounty of the officers of the Army at this place.³

The petition also states that Gillum had a wife and nine children, and that William Right had a wife and eight children, making a total of twenty-one Baleys, the largest family group in the wagon train. It is difficult to imagine how so many people could be crowded into the small quarters allowed single officers in a frontier post. It is probable that some of the emigrants, particularly the older children, were quartered in tents lent to them by the army.

Like many of the other emigrants, the Baleys had sold their farms back in Nodaway County before leaving for California and had
no place to return to in Missouri. The proceeds from the sale of their farms had been invested in livestock for a later resale in California, and for the expenses of the trip across the plains. Now that this was lost, they were forced to live on the bounty of others. Unlike Rose, they had no wealthy relatives from whom they could borrow money or receive extensive aid. The brothers stated in their petition that they were unable to obtain employment, but since the petition was dated November 19, they hadn’t yet had much time to look for work. They, too, were eventually employed by the army.

The Hedgpeths, like the Baleys and others, arrived back in Albuquerque in a destitute condition. The plight of the elder Hedgpeths was particularly severe due to their advanced ages. Jane Hedgpeth’s health had begun to deteriorate during the return trip. The long overland journeys seemed to be particularly hard on elderly women. The Hedgpeths also were housed by the army and given employment as herders and teamsters.

In the spring of 1859, Thomas Hedgpeth and his family returned to Missouri. They had seen enough of the Elephant! Thomas became a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and spent the remainder of his life doing the Lord’s work in his native state of Missouri.

The individual who probably suffered most from the long ordeal was Mary Brown, the widow of Rose’s foreman, Alpha Brown. She not only lost her husband in the battle with the Mojaves, but her thirteen-year-old daughter, Sallie Fox, had been seriously wounded during the attack. The members of the local Masonic Lodge did everything in their power to aid the unfortunate widow and her children. Alpha Brown had been a member of the Freemasons back in Iowa, and when the wagon train stopped in Albuquerque on the outward journey, he made it a point to visit the Albuquerque chapter and get acquainted with his Masonic brethren there. They did everything possible to comfort and aid the widow and children of their departed brother.

If fate hadn’t already been cruel enough to Mary, she now dealt the hapless widow yet another blow. Her five-year-old son, Orrin, became seriously ill and died. Every effort was made to save the little fellow, but the effects of malnutrition and disease were too much for the medical technology of the time. His tiny coffin was hauled by
wagon to the small burial ground set apart for the Americans living in Albuquerque. After it had been lowered into the ground and covered with dirt, well watered by tears, the mourners gathered stones and placed them on the grave to prevent wolves from digging up the body. As the grieving mother turned to take one last look at her son’s final resting place, an agonizing cry burst from her lips: “Oh my boy, my boy! How can I leave him there?” The blow was somewhat softened by a promise from the local Freemasons to look after the grave.

All the emigrants were deeply saddened by the little boy’s death, but outside of his immediate family, none took the death harder than did E. O. Smith, who was particularly fond of Orrin. The little fellow would summon Smith to such meals as they had by calling out, “Smiffy, come to beans [dinner].” Smith would respond with a smile on his face and come leading the small messenger by a forefinger. Orrin’s half-sister, since become Sallie Fox Allen, clearly recalled this incident when she attended the funeral of E. O. Smith in San Jose, California, many years later. As she paused by his casket and looked down upon his kindly face for the last time, the words, “Smiffy, come to beans,” seemed to ring in her ears. She wondered if, perhaps, somewhere out there in the great beyond, the two of them might be walking hand in hand to the promise of a far richer repast than they had ever envisioned while together on Earth.

The date of the little boy’s death is not recorded, but it might have occurred soon after the return to Albuquerque; he possibly became ill while on the way back. While we cannot be sure of the disease that claimed the little victim, we can be sure that whatever it was, hunger and exposure played its deadly part. Poor Mary Brown, to preserve her sanity, her family reported, would unravel one stocking at a time and then reknit it, repeating the process over and over again until her fingers became numb and swollen from the effort!

Shortly after their return to Albuquerque, the emigrants held a meeting at Gillum Baley’s residence, at which time they elected officers, adopted a preamble, and drew up certain resolutions, which they forwarded to government officials in Washington, D.C. These were printed in the Santa Fe Gazette on December 4, 1858, and copied by other newspapers:
At a meeting held at Gilham Bailey’s [Gillum Baley’s] residence in Albuquerque New Mexico, on the 20th day of November 1858, by the returned emigrants who were going to California on Lt. Beale’s route and were driven back to this place by the Mohave Indians from the Colorado River, E. M. Jones was appointed chairman and John McCord Secretary, when the following preamble and resolutions were unanimously adopted:

Whereas, When we arrived in Albuquerque on our road to California last spring, the officers of the army and American citizens of this place received us in the most friendly manner and furnished us all the information in their power as well as paying a part of the expenses of our guide for crossing the plains; and whereas, when we were driven back from the Colorado river to this place by the Indians, ourselves and families nearly famished on the road for want of provisions; and whereas, an express was sent by us to Fort Defiance informing the officers in command at that point of our deplorable situation, which express could not reach them on account of the war with the Navajo Indians, but went directly to this place; and whereas, the moment our distress was made known by our express to the officers in command at this place they immediately relieved our wants by sending us three wagons loaded with provisions, and also an escort of soldiers to protect us from the depredations of the Indians, and also to haul in the more unfortunate who had lost all their teams; and whereas, after our arrival at this place the officers of the army gave us a part of their own quarters to shield us from the chilling blasts, and also provisioned us for thirty days after our arrival and treated us on all occasions in the most kind and gentlemanly manner. Therefore be it

Resolved, That we are not master of language sufficiently strong to convey to the officers and citizens of this place and Santa Fe our heartfelt thanks for the kindness they have shown us—a kindness which time never can obliterate from our memory.

Resolved, That the proceedings of this meeting be signed by all the emigrants present, and that a copy be sent to the Missouri Republican, St. Louis, Mo., also another to the Santa Fe Gazette N.M. with a request that they publish the same.

E. M. Jones, Chairman John M. Dailey [John Lucas Daley]
John McCord, Secretary Columbus Holbrooks
Robert Perkins Joseph Storm
Leonard J. Rose Henry C. Davis
Lewis J. Hedgpeth Wm. H. Reed
On the evening of December 9, 1858, a second meeting was held by the emigrants at the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Hotel in Albuquerque. They were joined at this meeting by a delegation of local citizens who had much to gain financially by keeping the emigrant routes open and unobstructed by Indian attacks. At this session an emphatic demand was made to the government for the establishment of two new military posts to better protect this new overland route to the West Coast. One of these posts was proposed for the Canadian River crossing on the eastern portion of the road to protect emigrants from Comanche and Kiowa Indians. Although the Rose-Baley wagon train was not molested by either of these tribes, other emigrants were not so fortunate.

The second post demanded by the delegates was for a strong fort to be established at Beale’s crossing of the Colorado River where the Rose-Baley wagon train had so recently suffered its devastating attack from the Mojave Indians. Copies of the resolutions adopted at this meeting were forwarded to various newspapers and prominent officials.

Meanwhile, there was nothing the emigrants could do but make themselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances while awaiting the coming of spring and warmer weather. Udell gives us some idea of the severity of the weather that winter in Albuquerque. His journal entry for December 2 read, “High wind and cold rain. Quite uncomfortable for an aged man to be out, but necessity compels me to do it.” It was necessary for him to be out in such severe weather because he had just started his job as a government herder the day before. For December 3, he recorded, “Snow six inches deep, and hard freezing weather.” Udell’s journal entries for this period are quite short, usually one brief entry covering a period of several days. He was probably too tired from working all day to do much writing when he got home at night. The winter of 1858–59 was apparently colder than usual for Albuquerque.
In his December 12 entry, Udell made an exception to his short journal entries. On that day he wrote at some length about a religious ceremony he witnessed at the local Catholic church in celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Each year on that date the locals reenacted a dramatic play called *La Aparición*, in which a vision of the Virgin Mary appears to a poor Aztec convert to Christianity. Udell’s puritanical upbringing and his lack of education and understanding of other cultures prevented him from appreciating the beauty and significance of this pageantry. He summarized his impression of the performance by writing, “Such doings frequently transpire among this people, under the title of sacred or sanctimonious. To me it is perfectly ridiculous and blasphemous.”

The period between December 14 and 24 must have been a dull time in Albuquerque. Udell wrote, “Nothing worthy of note.” Apparently there were no Protestant churches in town at that time, for had there been, Udell would certainly have attended services there and reported that fact in his journal. Instead, he and some of the other emigrants attended Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services at the local Catholic church. As one might expect, Udell found much to criticize at these services.

Dec. 25. Christmas. Last night and To-day the Mexican (Catholics) made themselves very ridiculous in the eyes of us Americans, in their attempts to celebrate the Birth of Christ. At night they claimed to have the Child (Jesus) born in their large Church. They presented the images of the Virgin Mary, the Apostles and many others, to a very large audience of spectators, and passed the ceremonies of having the Babe born in the presence of all, and had persons to talk and act the part of those who are recorded in Scriptures in relation to it. After the ceremony is over, all pay adoration and reverence to those images. To American Christians, it was considered most blasphemous mockery. The conduct of the day was very similar to that on the 12th. ⁸

Apparently nothing newsworthy happened during the last week of the year 1858, for again he recorded in his journal, “Nothing worthy of note.” But on the last day of the year he described another of those events that so aroused his puritanical wrath.
Dec. 31. This day a new scene among the Mexicans was presented to my eyes and ears. A rough, ragged, ugly-looking young man was traveling from door to door through the village [Albuquerque] with a box about one foot in length and six inches in width, containing a small coarse-looking image, apparently made of wood and painted white, with a glass over it; he would make a long prayer to the so-called Saint at every door, in behalf of the family, to be taken direct to Heaven, as they supposed, by the Saint which the image represents. He then receives a gift from the inmates of the house. All the parties seem to express as much sincerity and faith in that prayer to the little wooden image as I ever saw in a Protestant when praying to Almighty God. I was informed that this was a grant from the Priest to some devoted poor people to get their bread, and the Catholics dare not refuse to give them something. 

Udell recorded no New Year’s Eve or New Year’s Day celebration on the part of the American emigrants in Albuquerque. Perhaps they felt that they had little to celebrate other than simply being alive. The weather he reported as “Hard freezing nights, and cold, windy days; snow on the ground yet.” Sometime between January 21–25, the Udells received a letter from their son, Oliver, in California. The Butterfield Overland Mail was now in full operation and it was possible to receive mail in Albuquerque on a regular basis. They received another letter from Oliver on January 27; this one contained a check for fifty dollars, a gift much appreciated by the elderly couple.

Udell’s journal entries for the month of February, 1859, are mostly about the weather. He reported that, “Ice has frozen here this winter from ten to twelve inches thick.” The cold weather was hard on the sixty-three-year-old man who had to work outside every day herding cattle, and then come home and cut wood and help his invalid wife with the cooking and the washing.

Since there was no Protestant church in town, Udell and other emigrants organized a Sunday evening worship. Both he and Gillum Baley were lay preachers and probably took turns conducting the services. Udell’s journal entry for February 6 stated, “Our Sunday evening meetings continue with increasing interest. This evening I preached to a large and attentive congregation, principally officers and soldiers of the American Army.” Since the campaign against the Navajos was
recently concluded and a peace treaty signed, many officers and soldiers were returning to their posts after having been gone for several months.

On March 3, exciting news reached Albuquerque: Edward F. Beale arrived in town. Beale had just completed improvements to the Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, branch of the road. Accompanying him was a large group of engineers, topographers, explorers, soldiers, teamsters, laborers, and others.

Beale was anxious to get started on the second phase of the project—improving the road between Albuquerque and the Colorado River. He had spent the summer of 1858 in Washington, D.C., completing his reports and drawing maps of his proposed new wagon road. When completed, he presented them to his superior, Secretary of War John B. Floyd, who was greatly impressed with Beale’s work. He sent the reports to the House of Representatives along with a cover letter urging its speedy approval. Congress, too, was impressed with the project, for it quickly appropriated $100,000 for further road work and an additional $75,000 for the construction of bridges along the route, in essence making Beale’s Wagon Road the first federally funded interstate highway in the Southwest.