

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI. COURTHOUSE SQUARE
Courtesy Missouri Historical Society.

TRAVELS IN MEXICO

COMMENCING JUNE, 1846.

EL DIARIO DE DONA SUSANITA MAGOFFIN.

MY journal tells a story tonight different from what it has ever done before.

The curtain raises now with a new scene. This book of travels is *Act 2nd*, literally and truly. From the city of New York to the Plains of Mexico, is a stride that I myself can scarcely realize. But now for a bit of my wonderful travels so far.

This is the third day since we left Brother James's [James Wiley Magoffin]. Tuesday evening we went into Independence;¹ there we stayed one night only at Mr. Noland's Hotel.² On Wednesday morning I did considerable business; some shopping—little articles I had thought of only within a few days. I called to see Mrs. Owens,³ and on my return from there re-

¹ Independence, the seat of Jackson County, Missouri, five miles east of Kansas City, was laid out in 1827, and by 1831 had become the western rendezvous for both Santa Fé and Oregon traffic. During the season of departure of the trains it was a place of much bustle and activity.

² Smallwood Noland, familiarly called "Uncle Wood." His hotel was the largest and most commodious in Missouri, excepting those in St. Louis; it having accommodations for as many as four hundred guests. Mr. Noland was known from the Atlantic to the Pacific, having been a hotel keeper at this place for many years.

³ Wife of Samuel C. Owens, the trader. She was Fanny Young, a sister of Eliza Ann, wife of Governor Thomas Reynolds of Missouri. After the death of her husband in the battle of Sacra-

ceived two or three visits—next I arranged my trunk “plunder-basket” &c. And after dinner between the hours of 3 and 4 we left the little village of I— [Independence] for the residence of Mr. Barns, a gentleman some ten miles this side of that place. Here we procured a night’s lodging preparatory to a final departure. They were very kind to us. Mrs. Barns claims a relationship with me through the Harts; be it so or not I can’t tell.

On Thursday morning we left Mr. B’s at an early hour. They had us up by day-light, gave us breakfast almost as soon, and by 7 o’clock we were on the road.

Thursday 11th. Now the Prairie life begins! We soon left “the settlements” this morning. Our mules travel well and we jogged on at a rapid pace till 10 o’clock, when we came up with the waggons. They were encamped just at the edge of the last woods. As we proceeded from this thick wood of oaks and scrubby underbrush, my eyes were unable to satiate their longing for a sight of the wide spreading plains. The hot sun, or rather the wind which blew pretty roughly, compelled me to seek shelter with my friends, the carriage & a thick veil.

All our waggons were here, and those of two or three others of the traders. The animals made an extensive show indeed. Mules and oxen scattered in all directions. The teamsters were just “catching up,” and the cracking of whips, lowing of cattle, braying of mules, whooping and hallowing of the men was a novel sight rather. It is disagreeable to hear so much
 mento, she went to live in Platte County, Missouri. She did not long survive Colonel Owens, dying May 31, 1848.

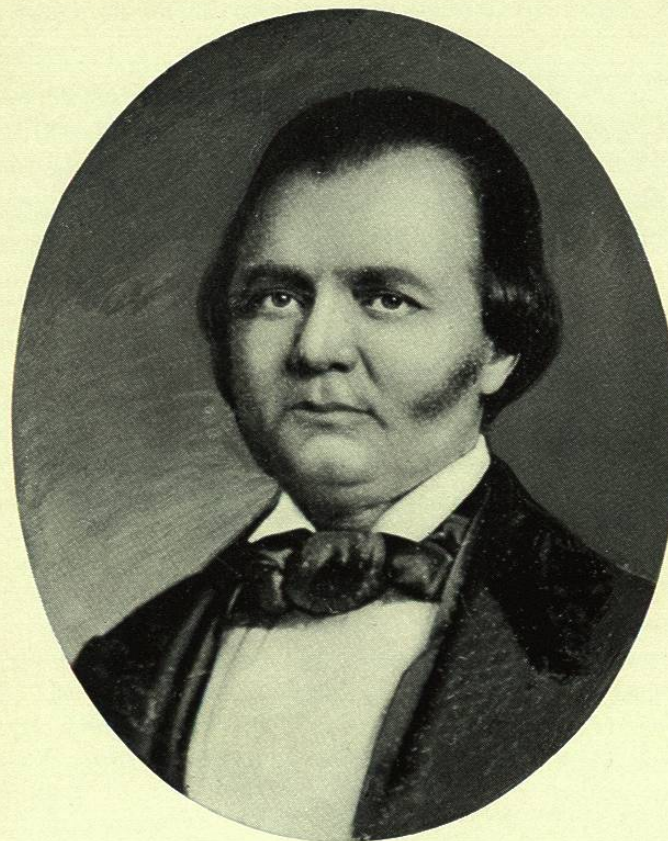
swearing; the animals are unruly tis true and worries the patience of their drivers, but I scarcely think they need be so profane. And the mules I believe are worse, for they kick and run so much faster. It is a common circumstance for a mule (when first brought into service) while they are hitching him in, to break away with chains and harness all on, and run for half hour or more with two or three horsemen at his heels endeavouring to stop him, or at least to keep him from running among the other stock. I saw a scamper while I sat in the carriage today. One of the mules belonging to Col. Owens scampered off, turning the heads of the whole collection nearly by the rattling of the chains. After a fine race one of his pursuers succeeded in catching the bridle, when the stubborn animal refused to lead and in defiance of all the man could do, he walked backwards all the way to camp leading his capturer instead of being led. Just as we were about leaving one of the Spanish traders came up and claimed a man (a Mexican) who had gone into the service of Don Manuel [Samuel Magoffin]. The man owed him some five dollars and he was determined to take it out of him by work. The poor fellow refused to go, pleading his last engagement, he had been favoured with the advancement of \$20.00 of his wages and could not go in consequence. He came to Don Manuel for a settlement; in a few minutes a dozen Mexicans were assembled around him, all jabbering about the matter. I seldom ever heard as much fuss; finally they concluded to bring the matter to Don Gabriel Valdez, his tent was some three miles off, but notwithstanding we must go there. So we left the wag-

gons and rode over, sending an express ahead to tell the gentleman we would dine with him. At 12 o'clock we arrived there, and found him in waiting to receive us. In a little while the matter was fixed.

Mi alma [my soul] treated him, the Mexican, to a little grog, ordered him a dinner and offered to pay him the sum he required of the man. After a stay of some two or three hours here, we again resumed our march, and soon caught up with the waggons. We now numbered, of ourselves only, quite a force. Fourteen big waggons with six yoke each, one baggage waggon with two yoke, one dearborn with two mules, (this concern carries my maid) our own carriage with two more mules and two men on mules driving the loose stock, consisting of nine and a half yoke of oxen, our riding horses two, and three mules, with Mr. Hall the superintendent of the waggons, together with his mule, we number twenty men, three are our tent servants (Mexicans). Jane, my attendant, two horses, nine mules, some two hundred oxen, and last though not least our dog Ring. A gray hound he is of noble descent; he is white with light brown spots, a nice watch for our tent door.

All the evening we drove on well. At half an hour by sun we came up with the waggons of Mr. McMannus⁴ and a Spaniard Armigo.⁵ They were just

⁴ Frank McManus was for many years a merchant in the Mexican trade. He was at Chihuahua with his fellow merchants, Connelly and Aull, when news came of the approach of the American troops and merchant trains, including that of McManus. About ten days before the battle of Sacramento, fought about fifteen miles north of Chihuahua, Governor Trias made an order



SAMUEL MAGOFFIN, IN 1845

From a medallion painted on ivory.

preparing to camp at "*The Lone Elm*," 35 miles from I— [Independence]. This is the first camping place from Fitzer's, which is at the border of Mo. and the place at which our wagons stayed the night before.

There is no other tree or bush or shrub save one Elm tree, which stands on a small elevation near the little creek or branch. The travellers always stop where there is water sufficient for all their animals. The grass is fine every place, it is so tall in some places as to conceal a man's waist.

sending all Americans seventy miles south of the town. About ten of them succeeded in evading this order by keeping themselves pretty much concealed. At the suggestion of the English Consul, Mr. Potts, they took refuge at the Mint while the battle was in progress. They took with them arms and a large quantity of ammunition to the roof of that building for protection in case of attack by the mob, which they felt sure would follow American defeat.

Here the small party waited in terrible suspense, knowing the great disparity in numbers between the American and Mexican forces. At length the news of Mexican defeat was wafted to them. The next day the American flag floated from the flagstaff on the Plaza and Frank McManus and his friend, Doctor Connelly, reopened their respective stores and proceeded to sell their goods.

⁵ Besides General Armijo, there were three others of that name in the Santa Fé trade, namely: J. C., Rafael, and A. J. Armijo. They passed through St. Louis on their way to New York in December, 1845, to purchase their winter outfit. They carried with them over fifty thousand dollars in specie. In March, 1846, J. C. and A. Armijo again arrived in St. Louis on their way East to purchase the goods carried on the expedition described by Mrs. Magoffin.

We crossed the branch and stretched our tent. It is a grand affair indeed. 'Twas made in Philadelphia by a regular tent-maker of the army, and every thing is complete. It is conical shape, with an iron pole and wooden ball; we have a table in it that is fastened to the pole, and a little stand above it that serves for a dressing bureau—it holds our glass, combs &c. Our bed is as good as many houses have; sheets, blankets, counterpanes, pillows &c. We have a carpet made of sail duck, have portable stools they are called; they are two legs crossed with a pin through the center on which they turn as a pivot; the seat part is made of carpeting. To be brief the whole is a complete affair.

Well after a supper at *my own table* and in *my own house*,—and I can say what few women in civilized life ever could, that the first house of his own to which my husband took me to after our marriage was a *tent*; and the first table of my own at which I ever sat was a cedar one, made with only *one leg* and that was a tent pole. But as I said after the first supper at *my own table* consisting of fried ham and eggs, biscuit and a cup of shrub, for I preferred it to tea or café—I enjoyed a fine night's rest; it was sweet indeed.

Friday 12th. This morning we were up soon of course. It is fine weather, cool and bracing. I have a cold though, and cannot enjoy it as much as I hope to do. I took it in Independence, though I calculate on the Prairies curing me. We had an early breakfast, and an early start—that is by 7 o'clock. Nothing of importance occurred till noon when we stopped for

dinner at "Big Bull Creek." The travellers call this "nooning it." Here we had no wood; there are no trees, and we provided none in the morning so we were obliged to take a dinner of crackers with a little ham fried at the small fire of the wagoners. It went quite well though with a tin cup of shrub. At night we struck camp at "Black Jack," fourteen miles from the last, and 49 from Ind [ependence]. The sun was an hour high when we stoped and as the wagons had not come up we could not strike camp. Being tired of the carriage I got out and took a ramble. I picked numberless flowers with which the plains are covered, and as *mi alma* told me before we started, I threw them away to gather more. I wearied myself out at this, and as the tent was now up, I returned "*home*." There before supper I had a little piece of work to attend to, I mean the feeding of my chickens. It is quite a farm house this; poultry, dogs, cattle, mules, horses &c. Altogether my home is one not to be objected to.

The two companies, McMannus and the Mexicans, are on the other side of the creek to us.

Saturday 13th. This morning we have a dense fog. The other companies are up and off before us.

Noon on the wide Prairie. Well we are going to "noon it" now. We are up on the Prairie with not a tree near us; some are in sight, but none near enough for shelter. The sun is very warm; the oxen are unyoked and are straying off to the water and for grass. This is a good time to write, here in the carriage. I

have all the materials, and will take advantage of the time.

This A. M. about 10 o'clock we met an Indian trader returning from "Bent's Fort" up the big Arkansas river. He is returning with his cargo of skins; we stoped and had half hour's conversation with him, respecting the road, war news &c. It is all pretty good. Says the Indians are pretty bad about Pawnee Fork, which is 298 miles from Ind [ependence]. His wagons we met about half a mile back; they are loaded with skins. A negro woman, who is coming up from the fort with them, has been up here to see us.

It is now about 6 o'clock P. M. we are still in the same track. The wagons have started on and most of them are out of sight. The hindermost one has stuck in a mud hole and they are doubling and tripling teams to pull it out, and I believe have finally succeeded and now we will proceed.

Camp No. 3. We have made but a poor travel to day; not more than eight miles. We were late starting in the morning, and stoped at noon quite a long while.

Got off from camp this P. M. by 4 o'clock, but the mud hole detained us two full hours; so to make up in some measure we did not stop till after 8 o'clock tonight. We had to turn out the cattle, stake tent, and make a fire before we could do anything towards supper. It was after 10 o'clock some time before we got it; it made us enjoy it more though.

Camp No. 4. We are out on the Prairie now, with a plenty of water. The oxen were half gone this morning when we got up. The men found most of them

though some distance from camp; for the missing ones four yoke we sent two Mexicans. Those wagoners to whom they belonged had to yoke up new ones, which detained us till 9 o'clock. We went on till 1 o'clock when we stoped to noon it, but without water. We left again at four, and continued till precisely sundown this P. M.

This is my first sabbath on the plains!

A very quiet one it has been too, something I had not looked for. But all the men seem to recollect it and hitch in their teams with half the trouble, and I have scarcely heard an oath the whole day. Every thing has been perfectly still and quiet, scarcely a breath of air, or the fliting of a feathered warbler has appeared to disturb the solemn stillness. Ever and anon the sharp whistle of a partridge, the chirp of a lark, or the croaking of a raven in the distant woods, were heard. Save these and the unusually gentle noise made by the waggoners, no other sound conspired to mar the solemn stillness of a sabbath on the Prairies.

The men who went after the cattle have returned with them; found at our last night's camping ground on their way back.

Monday 15th. Noon out on the wide Prairie. The Sun it seems is exerting himself; not a breath of air is stirring, and everything is scorching with heat. We have no water and the animals are panting with thirst; their drivers are seeking shelter under the wagons; while *mi alma* is under the carriage.

We left camp this morning at 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ o'clock; have

traveled finely all the morning till 11½ o'clock, when we stoped.

While at dinner the mules and horses all but two got loose and wandered off a short distance, which did not alarm the men any; soon however they were entirely out of sight, and it was only by hard riding they were taken; they were in a fine trot for Ind [dependence].

Last night the oxen made another start for home. Just as we were fixing for a fine night's sleep, they came breaking by our tent from the water, where perhaps they had been frightened by a wolf, with as much noise as 20 empty wagons. The men stood on guard all night after this little fright.

Camp No. 5. At the 110 mile creek, 95 miles from Independence. Tonight is my fifth *en el campo* [in camp]. Oh, this is a life I would not exchange for a good deal! There is such independence, so much free uncontaminated air, which impregnates the mind, the feelings, nay every thought, with purity. I breathe free without that oppression and uneasiness felt in the gossiping circles of a settled home.

We left the noon creek this P. M. at 5 o'clock. While there a company of U. S. Dragoons, who have been ordered out for the protection of the traders to Santa Fé came up.⁶ They are some 70 in number, passed on before us and camped about half mile ahead.

⁶ Captain Benjamin Moore's company of United States Dragoons, which was sent to overtake Albert Speyers' caravan, carrying arms and ammunition to the Mexicans.

The drive today has been pretty well.

The camping place tonight is near a creek, which at present is quite small. A thick woods is just before us which we must pass in the morning; some repairs must be done on it (the road) first, or we should have gone over tonight. Took a little walk this evening while they were fixing the tent, and picked some little pebbles which I shall take home as a specimen of my Prairie curiosities. None of the flowers, of which there are innumerable quantities and varieties, have gone to seed as yet, so I must press them in a book to take home. I fixed some this evening in my journal.

We find some beautiful roses—quantities of wild pinks. One flower to which, for want of a better one, I have given the name of the "hour glass" from its peculiar shape. It is brown and yellow, with a fuzzy pale green leaf. The little flowers, the leaves of which turn in both ways, up and down—the middle is quite small and the whole is quite like an hour-glass, at least my fancy has made it so—but as I was going to say the flowers are very small and hang in a thick cluster only at the top of the stem. I have found wild onions, and a kind of wild bean. The former is very *strong*, rather gluey and grows pretty deep in the ground. The flower and seed resemble the *cultivated* root.

Of Roses there are any quantity. Now at my tent door there are two bushes, one on either side, and inside nearly all the way from the head of my bed to the door are bushes with full blown roses, bursting and closed buds. It is the life of a wandering princess, mine. When I do not wish to get out myself to pick

flowers the Mexican servants riding on mules busy themselves picking them for me.

Tuesday 16th. Bridge Cr. 103 ms. from I [Independence], and 8 from Camp No. 5. Noon. Left camp at 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ o'clock—passed through a thick woods at 110. The soldiers who had encamped on the other side of it, left a considerable time before us. One came over to our camp though "to inquire the way." I think to a bottle of grog, though he said to the next camping place. After his departure we came on ahead of the wagons, to this place. It is a small creek with steep bank, and these covered thickly with trees and smaller undergrowth, for nearly two hours I have been wandering among them picking raspberries and gooseberries, of which there are an abundance. We fixed a line and tried to fish a little but I believe there are none in the stream.

After dinner I layed down with *mi alma* on a buffalo skin with the carriage seats for pillows and took what few ladies have done a siesta in the sun.

Camp No. 6. Rock Creek. Rode on ahead of the wagons, and selected a camping ground. The creek is at present quite low. In high water though it is a bold and deep stream. Its banks are of slate rock mostly. A number of trees are near them, and quantities of small undergrowth. After a ramble of an hour among them, during which time I crossed and recrossed the creek to *mi alma's* astonishment, on the stones lying in it, we fixed a line and hook and made the attempt to fish. Nothing but small minners would bite. So growing weary of catching *nothing*, and being annoyed

much by the mosquitoes, I left *mi alma* to "fish for himself" and came to my little house, which I found more agreeable to my feelings.

Camp No. 7. Wednesday 17th. Last night I had a wolfish kind of a serenade! May Pan preserve me from the like tonight. Just as I had fixed myself for sleep after fanning off to some other quarters the mosquitoes, the delightful music began. Bak! ba! gnow, gnow, in such quick succession, it was almost impossible to distinguish one from the other. It was a mixture of cat, dog, sheep, wolf and the dear know what else. It was enough to frighten off sleep and everything else.

Ring, my dear, good dog! was lying under my side of the bed, which was next to wolves, the instant they came up, he had been listening, he flew out with a fierce bark, and drove them away. I felt like caressing him for his kindness, but I had another business to attend to just then. Rided of our pest, I was destined to suffer from another. The winged pestilence unsatisfied with having their greedy thirst only half filled, returned with double force and vigor, to the attack. Here went my hands slap, slap, first one side then the other, meeting ever and anon the half closed palm of *mi alma*, who slept between the intervals of the sting. I was but a short time engaged at this when the serenaders began again. Save the mingled and confused noise they made, and the lone screech of an owl no other sound could be heard without. The stock had all ceased their wanderings and the teamsters their watching. The mosquitoes, impudent things, had learned