

HOLY CROSS ON THE GOLD DUST TRAIL:

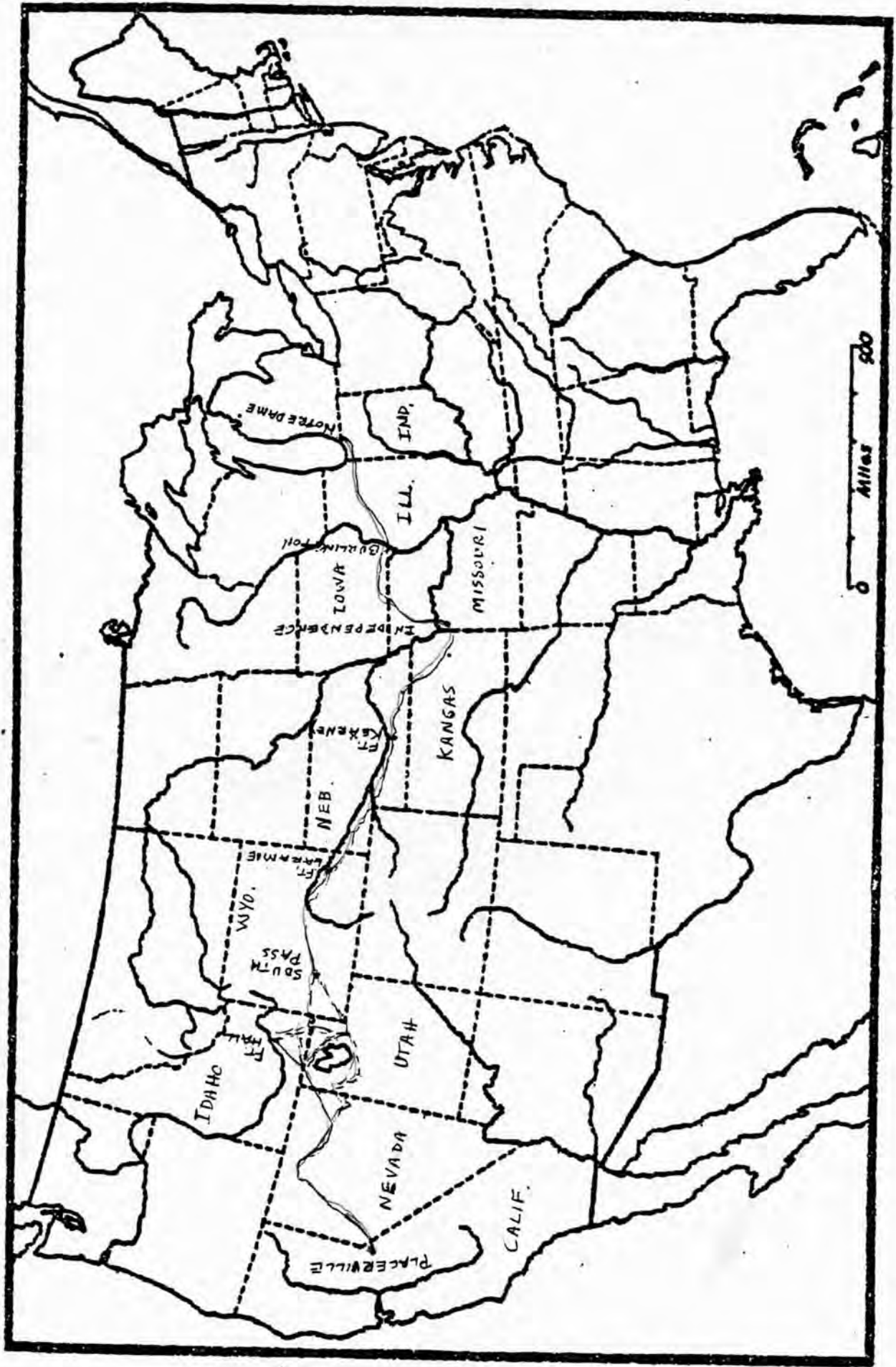
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The 1850 Expedition to California

by

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Brothers of Holy Cross
Mountain View, California
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ROUTE COVERED BY ST. JOSEPH COMPANY FROM NOTRE DAME, INDIANA,
TO PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA--FEBRUARY 28 TO JULY 17, 1850

(Note: Dotted segments represent cut-offs available. It is not known whether the route was actually used.)

I. Preparations.

When on January 24, 1848, John Marshall saw a few flakes of metal glistening in the tailrace of the sawmill he was constructing on California's American River he immediately sensed the importance of his find. Of course he did not dream that a Gold Rush to follow would radically change life on the West Coast as California evolved within four years from a quiet, rural territory of 14,000 inhabitants (not including the native Indians) to a rich, bustling state of over 225,000 residents.

At first Marshall tried to keep his discovery a secret, but this was impossible. Soon men from all walks of life were rushing to the Mother Lode. By the end of the year six thousand men would extract approximately \$10,000,000 in gold. (In the peak year of 1853, 100,000 prospectors would dig up \$65,000,000 in the precious metal.)

News of such riches did not take long to travel eastward to the states in the Midwest and on the Atlantic seaboard and on to foreign countries as well. In due course the word reached St. Joseph County, Indiana, where a comparatively remarkable number were lured across the plains. The 1850 census for the county lists 1,048 families. From these, 112 known individuals set out for the gold fields in 1849 alone.¹ By the following spring an estimated 170 more followed their neighbors to the west.² These joined 47,000 other fortune-seekers to take to the California Trail in 1850.

Naturally gold became a big topic amongst the faculty and students at Notre Dame University. A number of the emigrants were relatives of students or were alumni of the school. For example, among them was Alexis Caquillard³ who enrolled as its very first student in 1842.

With Notre Dame's ever-present and severe shortage of funds the temptation to seek gold was overpowering.

The minutes of the Minor Chapter (as the Local Council was called in those days) for September 28, 1849, reads:

Whereas our debts, and of course their interests, are constantly increasing; whereas we do not see any ordinary means to be able for a long while to pay so many debts, we have unanimously resolved to make use of a means, which, though it will appear strange and extraordinary to some, is in no way unjust and unlawful. That is, three Brothers will be sent to California to dig gold: Brother Lawrence, as director of the two others, Brothers John and Michael. None of these will go but of his own accord.

Less than two months later the financial situation was worsened by a fire which destroyed the apprentices' workshops, the kitchen, the bakery, and a large quantity of furnishings and supplies. The prospect of obtaining gold was more attractive than ever.

Years later Father Edward Sorin, the superior, in writing his Chronicles elaborated on his decision:

For a long time the pecuniary embarrassments of the establishment had caused the administration an interminable series of bitterness and misery. The ravages of fire at first seemed destined to crown all the rest. Reflection begot the hope that God who had thus far done everything at Notre Dame du Lac, would not permit his work to perish, but would rather make this new trial serve for the accomplishment of his merciful designs.

An extraordinary event almost compelled the members of the Chapter to take a step in whose success, none of them would have placed any confidence, had it not been, in their unanimous opinion, justified before God by two powerful motives, namely: that of preventing a terrible scandal which might ruin the work; 2. that of trying a means of paying arrears of indebtedness-- and in the eyes of the public (justified) by the consequences of a fire which were to be repaired.

On these grounds the expedition to California was decided upon.

Brother Gatian was going to leave the Society to marry, and to settle down near the college. He consented to depart for those distant regions. Three other Brothers who could be relied on and three other companions were given him and all set out towards the end of March with the purpose of devoting themselves to the establishment of the Apprentices' House.*

As will be seen later, despite his rationalizations Father Sorin was censured severely for this undertaking.

According to the above minutes the Brothers originally named for the expedition were Brothers Lawrence, John, and Michael. By the end of January 1850 Brothers John and Michael had been replaced by Brothers Alexis and Placidus for some unspecified reason. Then sometime before the actual departure Brother Alexis was replaced by Brother Justin, and Brother Gatian was added to the party for the reason given above by Father Sorin.

These four Brothers joined with three laymen one of whom was chosen leader of the expedition. The seven members represented a rather wide range of backgrounds and abilities.

Captain George B. Woodworth, 45, is listed in the United States Census for 1850 as a sailor. On just what vessel he may have been a captain is not known. He was a native of Connecticut, but his home for some years was in

* Father Sorin wrote his Chronicles in French giving the name Frère Gatien as the potential cause of scandal. Father John Toohey who later prepared an English edition mistranslated this name into Brother Steven. This error has been carried over into other accounts of the expedition causing much confusion in the matter. Also, Father Sorin should have given the end of February as the time of departure.

New York. In 1843 he and his family moved to South Bend with Samuel Byerley and the latter's family. Byerley, it will be remembered, was the benefactor who met Father Sorin and the original party of Brothers when they disembarked in New York in 1841. It is most likely that Woodworth first met members of Holy Cross through this friend. At the time of the California expedition the Woodworths had four children and a fifth was born five months after the father's departure. The two oldest boys, John and Francis, were Notre Dame students at this time, and a third, Thomas, some years later.

Apparently Woodworth operated a farm near Notre Dame as the local council minutes for June 29, 1849 state: "Cattle will be taken from Mr. Woodworth as a payment for his sons' schooling, but, of course, not at an exorbitant price." (Earlier that year one son's account was credited \$7.00 for a barrel of fish!) Just why this sailor-turned-farmer was chosen to head the expedition is not recorded.

Brother Lawrence (Jean) Menage was named "lieutenant" of the party. Born in Brécé (Mayenne) France in 1815, he entered the brotherhood in 1840 and was professed the following July 22 in Le Mans. This was about two weeks before his leaving for America as a member of the first Holy Cross contingent to cross the Atlantic.

Coming to Notre Dame with the second group from St. Peter's near Vincennes in February 1843, he became director of the farm there. A photograph taken in later life shows Brother Lawrence to have been a large man of obvious strength.

In an 1846 memo Father Sorin refers to Brother Lawrence's "excessive zeal and want of tact." However, later he was to become a most trusted and valued counselor of the superior.

The oldest of the California-bound men, Brother Justin (Louis) Gautier, was born on February 9, 1801, in Vivoin (Sarthe), France. He received the habit at Le Mans in August 1839 and was professed there a year later. He departed for America in September 1844 in the group of six Holy Cross religious accompanied by Brother Vincent who had been sent back to the motherhouse earlier that year chiefly to recruit members for America. The group arrived in New York in about a month but only after surviving near disaster in a violent storm en route.

Brother Justin worked at Notre Dame in his trade of shoemaker and was

noted by Father Sorin for his simplicity of character and childlike obedience.

Brother Placidus (Urban) Allard who would meet death in the California venture was born on a farm near Voivre (Sarthe), France, on February 2, 1812, and received the habit at Le Mans on his twenty-seventh birthday. He made his profession of vows in 1844 and traveled to America in July 1846. Apparently he had little or no formal education as in a document to be mentioned below he did not actually sign his name but simply drew an "X" for "his mark."

After serving for a while at Notre Dame as a baker, Brother Placidus was sent to work on the farm at Pokagon, Michigan. He was back at the Lake by 1848, for the local chapter's minutes for April 17 of that year states:

Brother Placid will be advised by Fr. Cointet to refrain from rough and impolite answers to the Brothers or the Pupils.

And on April 26:

Brother Placid having disedified the community and the Pupils should be sent to some other employment if possible. Brother Lawrence offered to take him at the farm. This offer pleased the council as it would remove the Brother from the place of recreation, where he is not liked.

Brother Placidus must have learned something from this humiliating move for he took a definite step to curb his temper. In a record of professions made at Notre Dame on August 21, 1848, he is included as having "made the vow of never speaking when he would be angry and also of not saying or doing anything against the authority and respect due to the Superior."

The youngest of the four religious was Brother Gatian (Urban) Monsimer, a remarkably talented man who was also in the first group to emigrate to America. Born on April 3, 1826, on a farm at Saulges (Mayenne), France, he was only fourteen years old when he received the habit at Le Mans on the same day in August 1840 as Brother Lawrence. According to one record he professed vows a year later; other accounts say he was not professed by then. The latter seems more likely in view of his extreme youth.

At St. Peter's he immediately set about learning English well enough to teach in that language within a few weeks. He was among the first group to move up to Notre Dame and there he made quite a name for himself as a teacher. Many years later Timothy Howard recalling his student days at the school wrote:

Brother Gatian was a genius, an incomprehensible Frenchman! He was capable of doing anything and everything. He was at that early day the intellectual soul of the institution. Peace to his ashes!⁴

The value that Father Sorin placed on the young Brother's abilities is evidenced by the fact that he was sent to New York in 1849 to investigate

and report on the serious administrative, educational, and financial difficulties existing at Assumption School conducted there by the Brothers.

It was Brother Gatian's facility in graphically reporting in excellent English his observations that made this report on the California venture possible because as secretary of the St. Joseph Company (the official name of the group) he wrote several long and detailed letters still extant which describe the journey in a diary form. In contrast, the few letters written by Brother Lawrence are in poor French and partly illegible.

It has been noted above why Father Sorin urged Brother Gatian to join the California group. Perhaps he thought the young man would reconsider his plan to marry and would return to Notre Dame to continue as before. However, just how clear Brother Gatian was on this motivation is uncertain for in a letter of August 15, 1851, the young man wrote:

I am sorry that for my sake you have sent Brothers to California. Had I known it, I might have avoided you the trouble, for I always believed the expedition worse than useless & not according to God; but I did not suppose it my duty to give an advice which you would not have heeded.

Gregory Campau was a student at Notre Dame from 1845 to the date of departure for California in 1850. He was described on an earlier occasion as "a boarder of muscular strength." His moral and religious convictions also impressed Brother Gatian who referred to him in one letter as "the constant servant of Mary."

Little is known of Michael Dowling, the seventh member of the party. There are references in 1844 and 1845 of his working at Notre Dame so probably he was either an apprentice or a hired firm worker there.

The status, backgrounds and abilities of the seven prospectors from Notre Dame was so varied that it was especially necessary that a detailed agreement be drawn up between the individuals and the university. This was done and signed by all the members on February 27, 1850, in the presence of two witnesses. In reading the regulations given here in full it is interesting to note the care with which "regular observance" of religious exercises and other practices of the Brothers are to be safeguarded.

REGULATIONS FOR THE ST. JOSEPH COMPANY

All the members of the St. Joseph's Company starting for California bind themselves to observe the following Rules:

1st - They shall remain united together in common interests for the space of two years from the day of their departure from Notre Dame du Lac; and whoever will leave the company before the said time of two years, forfeits all his rights.

2nd - They shall in all occasions deal with each other as members of one & the same family, especially in cases of sickness, danger, distress in any want whatever.

3rd - They shall be governed by the daily Regulations which are followed here by the Brothers of St. Joseph, as far as morning and evening prayers are concerned, & whenever there will be possibility of attending meditation, Particular Examination, Spiritual Reading & Beads, they shall comply with them as their fellow Brothers at home. On Sundays and festival days, days of abstinence, and in every thing belonging to the practice of our holy Religion, they shall always endeavour to behave themselves individually and as a family fearing God and seeking for their success in their dangerous mission, in showing themselves every way good religious men.

4th - Every first Sunday of the month, they shall perform their monthly retreat as at home.

5th - The Company shall be governed by a Captain & Lieutenant & in every important occasion, if practicable, all the members shall have the right of deliberation and of vote & the majority shall decide, the Captain having only in cases of perfect equality in both sides, a prepondering weight.

6th - Obedience of the officers shall be prompt & perfect in all cases, this being totally indispensable for the welfare of the Company.

7th - The Secretary shall keep an exact account of all receipts & expenses from the beginning to the expiration of the Company existing as such, without ever charging any individual for a personal loss, sickness or accident, or crediting him for any personal profit or industry. Clothing, however, shall be charged to each individual.

8th - Whenever an opportunity will be offered of attending Mass or being at Confession it is well understood that all shall profit by it.

9th - All the members of the St. Joseph's Company may rest assured that they shall be remembered here every day in the prayers of the Community. Every day there shall be a Communion offered in their behalf & every Sunday whenever two Masses will be celebrated here, the first shall be offered for them and for the success of their mission. Moreover, they must be well convinced that in the case of necessity, any check or draft signed by the captain, lieutenant and secretary of said Company shall be honored by the President of the University of Notre Dame du Lac.

10th - Any member dying before his return or the expiration of two years shall be entitled in the person or persons of his natural or legal heir or heirs, to his full share of profits, when the Company is dissolved. To prevent all difficulties on this point, all the members starting shall leave in the archives of the University, each one his last will, sealed in due form.

11th - Should anyone die within said time, one hundred dollars shall be taken out of the common profits, for Masses to be offered for the benefit of his soul.

12th - In all difficulties, dangers or trials let all confidently call upon the Holy Names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and make the meditation of these glorious names the habitual occupation of their leisure moments.

13th - The members of the Company shall always be employed, either together or separately, to the best advantage of the Company, according to their personal abilities, whenever and as long as it can be done without imprudence.

14th - Every first Monday of the month the secretary must be in possession of an exact account of the earnings of each individual, when they do not work together, & give the Company in Council a full knowledge of the receipts & expenses of the last month.

15th - In case of death all the Members of the St. Joseph's Company, excepting only Mr. George Woodworth, choose and recognize here the President of the University of Notre Dame du Lac, Indiana, for their legal executor of last will, waiving all laws contrary to this disposition.

16th - Two months before the expiration of the two years the Company shall decide whether the division of the proceeds must be made then or the work continued for two months longer.

17th - In case anyone should wish to remain in California, he would have a right to a full share of the proceeds then on hand, before the return of the Company, provisions, goods, tools, etc. being estimated at California prices.

18th - Those of the Company who will return will divide the funds received by Notre Dame du Lac University without charging any interest on those funds.

19th - The members of the Company hereby acknowledge that the Company commences with a Capital of one thousand four hundred & fifty dollars.

20th - The Company is composed of the following Members, to wit: Mr. George Woodworth, Captain; Mr. John Menage, Lieutenant; Mr. Urban John Baptist Victor Monsimer, Secretary; & Messrs. Gregory J. Campau, Urban Alard, Louis J. Gautier & Michael Dowling.

21st - The Company shall be considered as dissolved on the twenty-eighth day of February, A.D. one thousand eight hundred and fifty two.

22nd - There will be three keys for the safe, one of which shall be kept by the Captain, one by the Lieutenant, & the third by the Secretary. The Captain will keep an account of the expenses & the Secretary will copy that account once a week into the regular cash book. A small book will be left in the safe into which will be entered all the sums deposited into the safe & all the sums taken out of the safe.

23rd - New members will not be admitted into the Company unless two thirds of the Company Members should vote for their admission.

In witness whereof the members of the St. Joseph's Company have signed the present agreement on this twenty-seventh day of February Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and fifty at Notre Dame du Lac University, St. Joseph's County, Ind.

A separate agreement was also made with Captain Woodworth who in consideration of the expenses incurred by Notre Dame in money and provisions for the venture "gives totally the two horses, the waggon and whatever he brings into the Company so that the whole fitting out of the Company is to be credited

to the University of Notre Dame de Lac."

Likewise, separate agreements were made with Gregory Campau and Michael Dowling in which Father Sorin binds himself to provide for each according to the Company regulations, and in return each agrees "to observe the Regulations of said Company during the space of two years and to give half of his share of the profits to Rev. E. Sorin or to his representatives when the Company shall be dissolved." Finally, each "acknowledges that Notre Dame du Lac University owes him nothing."

The university's waste book (i.e., day book) for 1850 gives a detailed listing of the many items purchased for the trip which totaled to a few dollars over the \$1,450 originally allotted.

The biggest expense was for nine horses (\$615) and two wagons together with equipment for the latter (\$164.50). Harnesses called for another \$113.00. Food supplies included such items as seventy-five pounds of sugar (\$6.75), one hundred pounds of ham and fifty pounds of sausage (\$10.50), one hundred pounds of codfish (\$6.25) sixty-nine pounds of tea (\$33.12), and five hundred pounds of sea bread (\$17.50). Three gallons each of brandy and whiskey were provided as were "sundry medicines."

As would be expected, various tools, lanterns, cooking utensils, and writing materials are on the list, but it is a bit surprising to see a pair of oars and one textbook each in arithmetic, algebra, surveying, legends, analytical geometry, bookkeeping, and French grammar there. Also, a Bible, the Ursuline Manual, and a dictionary were not forgotten. Only \$300.00 was retained in cash for purchases en route or upon arrival in California. All the above in addition to the personal effects of the seven men must have created quite a packing problem as the the one large and one small wagon were prepared.

February 28, 1850, was the day of departure for the trip which would take about four and a half months of arduous travel over close to three thousand miles. On a good day when road conditions, grass supply, and weather permitted they could hope to make twenty-five to thirty miles at most.

Apparently six horses were used to pull their large wagon and two the small one. The party was to discover before long that their choice of smaller horses rather than large farm horses or oxen was to save them much time on the journey. Oxen, for example, though very strong and capable of great endurance, plodded along at only two miles an hour.

II. On the trail.

The first letter received by Father Sorin from the travelers was written on March 5 near Joliet, Illinois, by Brother Lawrence. He reports that everyone is happy and in good spirits. However, Brother Gatian had had a close call when he fell under horses' hooves while attempting to leap over a stream and was saved from injury by the swift action of Brother Lawrence in halting the team.

The local innkeeper told them that forty-seven vehicles bound for California had preceded them and that the Joliet priest was leaving in a few days with a company of Irishmen. Brother Lawrence complains that the captain did not think it a good place there to stop over so the Brothers were not able to go into Mass as they wished.

The writer passed on a message from Brother Placidus that the latter asks Father Sorin to forget all the little troubles he had caused the priest and says that he prays every day for the success of the trip.

As for Brother Justin: "He is contented as a king and walks every day although he had promised not to travel on foot."

From Joliet the route generally followed the Illinois River westerly through such places as Morris, Marseilles, Ottawa, La Salle, and Peru. Then it struck out across the prairies from Princeton southwesterly through Osceola, Lafayette, Galesburg, and Monmouth. On March 13 they paid \$1.50 to be ferried across the Mississippi River at Burlington in southeastern Iowa.

Before pushing on from Burlington Brother Gatian wrote from there on March 15 that "the prairie roads of Illinois which, last year, occasioned so many delays to some of the Companies, are now in excellent order and to us they have been nearly as good as plank roads." He also remarks how fortunate they have been in crossing the numerous sloughs without accident. Even on one occasion when the horses harnessed to the large wagon while unattended bolted and ran nearly three miles the only loss was a gun worth twelve dollars.

He goes on to say:

As we advance towards the gold regions, the accounts respecting the diggings become more encouraging. The number of emigrants to California is immense. People say we are very early & still there are 200 teams ahead of us: yesterday we saw 9 teams within one mile.

He reports that they recently exchanged two horses for two ponies which gives them six ponies for the large wagon and "this team is deemed by all we meet to be the best that has yet been seen bound for California."

In another letter of the same date signed by both Brother Lawrence and Brother Gatian, Father Sorin is informed that they are troubled because the captain allows little thefts, now a bundle of hay, now a half-bushel of corn and other things of the like. These acts have little importance in themselves and Mr. Woodworth does not see any harm in them; but they are enough to set the police after them.

They fear that the Company could be discredited by such actions. The disapproval they have voiced has brought no change. They do not know what effect a letter from Father Sorin would have, but they ask him to write anyway and tell them what action to take in an extreme case.

The writers also complain that they have to travel on Sundays as well as on weekdays which does not give the Brothers time for prayer. In a postscript Brother Gatian adds that for the third time the captain did not make it possible for them to go to Mass and Confession even though it could have been arranged.

To dramatize their lack of opportunity for prayer in common, Brother Gatian writes:

When the horses broke loose without a driver, Brother Lawrence promised a thousand Aves. We do not have the time to say them. Would you have them said for us? It is a small miracle that the horses with our large wagon galloped 3 miles alone without any accident.

The trip from Burlington southwest to Independence, Missouri, the "jumping off place" where the wagon trains moved into Indian Territory, took travelers about three weeks. A letter written from there by Brother Gatian on April 9 states that the party is now able to lay over on Sundays as they cannot leave the frontier before the twentieth of April or the first of May.

Furthermore, they found camping more economical and sometimes more pleasant than the accommodations afforded by farmers or hotels.

Every evening, therefore, we have pitched our tent, scattered over the damp or frozen ground a little hay or straw, when we could procure it; and when we could not, we would, for a substitute rake a few leaves with our fingers, or mow a little prairie grass with our knives. Our itinerary lodgings being thus snugly put up, our horses fed and a large fire built in front of our tent, we would sit down to our rural supper, consisting of pork, sausages or codfish; and then we would make up our beds, say our evening prayers & lay down to rest in security, relying on Providence and the fidelity of our sentinel, for we have organized a guard, each man watching one hour and ten minutes.

It was after they had passed through Keosauqua that rain and snow made the roads difficult. To add to their troubles the king bolt on their small wagon broke, they lost their way near Bloomfield and advanced only nine miles on March 20.

After fording a number of creeks and rivers they reached Princeton, Missouri, "which though a county seat contains only about 15 houses," on the twenty-fifth. In this area they continued improving their horses with the captain exchanging his black horse for "an excellent American pacer." But there were problems with feeding them.

In Grande River Bottom our ponies had heavy pulling & yet were only fed twice a day. Once we traveled by moonlight to find corn for them. At another time we had to entreat an old woman during half an hour for a bushel of corn, & yet we had to pay one dollar in advance for it.

At Gentryville they had a treat for their Easter Sunday dinner, the captain having purchased a wild turkey weighing twenty-eight pounds for twenty-five cents.

For three days they passed through wide prairies which abounded in wild geese, prairie hens, turkeys, deer, and buffaloes. Brother Gatian recalls that on March 30 after passing through Plattsburg.

we pitched our tent on the premises of Mr. Atchison, the greatest wonder of nature which we have yet seen in our travels: he is 36 years old, 6 ft. 6 inches high, weighs 358 lbs. & has grown 10 inches in the last ten years.

As they now had time on their hands while waiting for the appearance of enough grass on the prairie to warrant moving on

Messrs. Dowling and Menage undertook to split rails, but the timber was so knotty that after two days of hard work during which they split 101 rails, for which they were allowed 63 cts, they gave up the job in despair.

Then they did some "housecleaning" having realized they were carrying too much weight.

Before leaving Mr. Atchison's we coupled our waggons anew and shortened the waggon boxes, we sold our beds (except the blankets), our plates, our knives & forks, our razors & shaving boxes, good many clothes and all our trunks except one. We will heave away many other articles before we leave among which I will mention the sheet iron stove. Mr. Menage's scow has not been used, we have thrown the oars overboard, the buggy seat of the small waggon has shared a similar fate. The motto of the best informed Californians is that the freight of every single pound hauled to California is one dollar at least.

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The repacking chore completed, they moved on toward the frontier.

Last Sunday morning after our auction & after taken 234 lbs. hams, we left our encampment & traveled 14 miles & then encamped in the vicinity of Liberty, having met Father Ward, the Priest of that town. Liberty is but a small town, 6 mi. north of the Missouri River. Yesterday morning we were at confession and heard Mass. We left our camp about 9 o'clock, crossed the Missouri at Independence Blue Hill Ferry about 2 o'clock. We paid two dollars for ferriage. . . . We reached the place selected for us about 8 o'clock, P.M. and took our supper at 9 o'clock after a fast of 13 hours. We will have to wait for grass until the 20th of April or perhaps the first of May, the season having been unusually cold. Messrs. Boucher & Rouleau [South Bend men] have been very kind to us; they seem to desire our company; but we do not envy their team & we shall probably not wait for them. They have selected the very worst team for California, viz., big horses. The emigrants of this section of the country take mules except a few who take oxen; but all would prefer our ponies.

The party found it necessary to restock supplies for the long, exhausting, sometimes dangerous stretch of plains, mountains, and desert to be crossed before reaching California during the next two or three months. There would be no towns on the way, only a few forts and trading posts. They had already traveled 615½ miles from South Bend to Independence according to the not-always-accurate Emigrants' Guide to California by Joseph Ware which they carried and consulted frequently. However, they were anxious to get going again.

Expectations were fed by stories told by those who had returned from California. Gregory Campau wrote to John Woodworth, the captain's son and student at Notre Dame, on April 17 reporting:

The further we come this way, the better the news is. Old Mr. Boucher, who is here told me that he saw a piece of gold in California which was 6 inches long, 2 inches wide, and 3 inches thick, and some weighed 96 pounds. Dear friend, I mention these rumors to say that money can here be made.

Appended to the letter of April 9 is a lengthy postscript dated April 26 which states that April 30 has been selected for their departure.

On the 23rd Capt. Woodworth went to the prairie and found that the grass has just made its appearance. He saw Californians encamped in every little valley, waiting for grass. A few companies more daring than the rest, taking a little grass with them, started about the 10th inst. & travelled about 150 mi. when their grain being consumed and finding no grass, they were obliged to return, discouraged and with starving cattle, horses or mules. Some were compelled to hire Indians to bring them back to Independence. We have thought it more prudent to stay here, where we have to pay comparatively little for grain, until the majority of the Californians think the grass long enough to start, than to go to St. Mary's where we would have to pay one dollar for a bu. of corn. We find the month of April very long, having almost nothing to do. We sleep the

greater part of the time and when we are not sleeping, we play at the game of fox and geese.

Capt. Woodworth has exchanged his American pacer for a good horse & we have bought an old mare for \$12 cash and Michael Dowling's watch. We still want another pony, but we cannot buy one unless we find an opportunity of giving some of our baggage in payment. We have replaced our cooking stove & utensils and a camp kettle. Our outfit is complete and we have a balance of about \$75 on hand.

We start with 600 lbs. hard bread, 100 lbs. flour, 350 lbs. bacon, 175 lbs. sugar, 50 lbs. rice, 50 lbs. salt, 220 lbs. apples, 90 lbs. beans, 3 gals. whiskey, 3 gals. Brandy, 7 gals. Vinegar, 3 gals. Molasses. These with various other articles, our baggage & 15 bu. corn, will make an amount of 3300 lbs. weight when we start.

Finally, Father Sorin is assured that he need not have the "paternal anxiety for our spiritual welfare" which he had expressed in his letter they had received the day before.

You need not, however apprehend any voluntary neglect of our religious duties. As soon as we shall have arrived at the mines, we shall attend to our exercises as would do at the Lake, and now every member says his morning prayer as soon as he gets up and his evening prayers before he goes to bed. When we came to this place, we thought we could go to Church every Sunday, but a heavy fall of rain has rendered the Blue impassable, the Missouri backing up the water. Still we expect to be able to ford the river next Sunday morning and to receive the Sacraments before we leave the Frontier.

All seven men signed the letter and it is interesting to note that the religious used their baptismal and family names rather than their religious names in doing so.

When they again set out on the trail they moved through the Indian Territory in what is now northeastern Kansas and on into present-day Nebraska. The next extant letter was dated May 19 when they were camped eighty-three miles west of Fort Kearney. Brother Gatian describes at length in sometimes flowery language the Platte River Valley which they are traversing. He then goes on to mention some not-so-pleasant details which must have given the group serious worries on their way from Independence.

(The traveller) passes through a country thickly inhabited and yet sees not a native. The trail of the Pawnee Indian is there and so is his hunting ground--a thousand stag, elk, or deer horns, and buffalo heads every two rods record Indian feasts. But the inhabitant does not show his face to the white man. We have traveled 200 miles in the Pawnee Territory and have seen a few deserted tents, but not a single red man. The Californians of last year have also left memoranda of their passage. The prairie within two miles of the road is fairly strewn with the bones of their dead animals, and we pass not a day without seeing a new grave. Still, no doubt we do not see more than one half of the bones and one fourth of the graves. This spring there is no disease on the road, and everything seems to favor the emigrants, with the exception of the grass.

So far we have not found any good grass and the only persons we have met, coming from the Mountains, two Companies of Fur Traders, with 12 ox teams loaded with skins, told us that they never had seen grass as backward. This extraordinary fact will, no doubt, cause a great mortality among the California animals. From the annexed diary, you will be able to estimate the number of deaths; I record only those of the preceding day, for wolves are so numerous, that they do not allow any animals to remain on the road more than 2 hours. Buffaloes, elks, deer, hares, antelopes, prairie hens and cranes abound in this vicinity of the Platte. Several Californians hunt and with some success; but being rather poorly fitted out, we all feel so tired after our day's work that we are not tempted to imitate their example. We start every morning between 6 and 7 o'clock. Some of us have to walk half of the time; others take care of the horses and cattle.

In subsequent entries of his diary Brother Gatian reports the actual number of dead animals he has spotted along the trail and the number of graves passed. In several cases he took time to jot down the names and dates found on the headboards of the graves.

Another account of the 1850 emigration states that 963 graves had been counted that year, deaths having been due chiefly to cholera and other diseases to which the travelers were very susceptible as a result of the near-starvation and other hardships encountered on their journey.⁵

It should not be imagined that the men from Notre Dame found themselves traveling for days in vast isolation, for as their secretary writes:

The California excitement is very great this year. There are from two to three thousand teams ahead of us; a little more than one third and a little less than one half of the emigration. We see on the road young and old, rich and poor, men and women, children and babies-- some with baggage; some with carts or wagons; others packing or walking. About one fourth working oxen, one fourth mules, one fourth American horses and the other fourth working ponies, packing or carrying their provisions on their backs. There is great emulation on the roads, teams pushing or passing each other. Some days, we have left more than 100 teams behind and still have been overtaken ourselves several times. Many kill their teams by hard driving.

People of all dispositions are to be met on the trail.

The majority of the Californians observe the Sabbath--some are hard cases, others indifferant and many real gentlemen. They are kind to all others and behave better than is generally thought. They are full of merrie jokes and our company is not dull. Many among us can crack good jokes.

Their rest at night is sometimes disturbed when Brother Lawrence "starts up in his sleep moaning about Pawnees or ponies" and "shakes the pillars" of their "itinerant temple" to the amusement of all.

As for Indians, they were told by soldiers at Fort Kearney that they had nothing to fear from them and that if any robberies do take place they are the acts of vagabond Californians (i.e., people on their way to the gold country). However, on May 7 they did have a scare when

About 2 o'clock, p.m., there were 52 waggons in a line and we were in the last train. All at once, some of our men thought they saw a wolf, but soon after that said that it was an Indian in a sitting or kneeling posture, aiming at one of our men. He fired and the white man returned the fire. Some of the men on the lead ran to the assistance of their comrade and fired at the Indian on the hill and other Pawnees in the valley. To our great wonder, none fell. We came nearer and found that all the fire came from the white men & the Pawnees were metamorphosed into prairie hens.

During the early part of May the company generally enjoyed good weather and had sufficient water, firewood, and grass. However, they found the road, though fairly good, to be very dusty, and the frequent crossing of streams, sloughs, and rivers a tiresome undertaking.

On May 10 the St. Joseph Company left the large train of wagons they had been traveling with some days in order to make better time. They had been covering around twenty-five miles a day at this time. Also, they took a pony from the small wagon and gave it to Brother Justin and Brother Lawrence that these two might walk and ride by turn.

As they pushed ahead, the possibility of trouble from the Indians increased.

A company lost 55 mules last night, one mile from our camp; they say the Indians came sneaking in the grass & frightened them away. We passed by a company of two waggons and a buggy who had lost 11 of 16 horses in a similar way, but they did not see the Indians. We are told that Indians frequently assume the shape of wolves or other animals, to commit their depredations.

The company reached Fort Kearney on May 15 and discovered that it consists of 3 good-looking houses, a dozen mud or turf houses, 3 feet above the ground and 2 underground, covered with bark or shingles, and several tents. Near the Fort there is a circular cornfield, 100 yds. in diameter, with turf hedges or trenches inside and outside. There is also a square field which is intended for a garden. Ft. Kearney is at the head of Grande Island. There are 150 soldiers, 8 women & a few children at the Fort.

Physical miseries suffered by individuals of the group are recorded. On May 16 Brother Lawrence had a toothache, and on the next day Captain Woodworth complained of a headache. Even the horses suffered injuries.

. . . This morning a waggon passed by our six-pony team and frightened the ponies; they put through the prairie, our middle horses fell and the hind horses with the waggon passed over them. One of them, Charley, had his leg bruised so that we cannot work him for some days.

Three days later they had to leave Charley behind as he could not walk. They released him "in a good pasture, & departed with heavy hearts, saying: May the wolves spare his life!!"

A note is appended to this letter of May 19:

N.B.: Today is Pentecost Sunday & you are no doubt feasting at the Lake. We have also our fun and dandy dishes. Mr. G. Campau mixed beans, pepper sauce, pork, molasses, tea & bread. I tasted the mixture & found it excellent. Capt. Woodworth tasted it & puked. It is good for odd fellows. Try it.

Apparently Brother Gatian had the opportunity at this time to give his letter/diary to someone going east who could mail it for him somewhere farther back, and he took advantage of the opportunity. It is disappointing to discover that if anything was written between May 20 and July 17 it has been lost. The route that would have been followed between these two dates would have covered the most trying and potentially dangerous leg of the trip. It would have been more than a little interesting to have read Brother Gatian's detailed reactions to events on this stretch of the way. However, so very many diaries kept by other gold seekers are available that what the Notre Dame party most probably experienced and saw can be fairly well determined.

The trail from Fort Kearney continued westerly along the southern bank of the Platte River with some hard work called for as the teams were driven up and down the hills there. After the Platte split into two forks the party would have then crossed the south fork and worked up to the north fork continuing from there in a northwesterly direction.

The men undoubtedly marveled at the large herds of buffalo they would have sighted and been fascinated with the series of huge and strange rock formations culminating at Scott's Bluff. Especially would they have been amazed at Chimney Rock towering up to 250 feet.

About twenty miles beyond Scott's Bluff they would pass into territory now a part of eastern Wyoming and after about another twenty-five miles would arrive at Fort Laramie.

This establishment from which three hundred American soldiers attempted to preserve peace among the Indians, consisted of thirty or forty good frame

buildings some with two storeys, the whole place enclosed by an eleven-foot high wall of adobe bricks.⁶ Here they could rest a bit and purchase some needed supplies before pressing on. They had covered 635 miles since leaving Independence according to Ware's Guide.

West of the fort the trail became quite rough and tortuous . It would take about ten days to get to Mormon's Crossing where they could ford or be ferried to the opposite bank of the North Platte River.*

The party probably had some contact with Sioux during this part of the journey as these usually friendly Indians often rode into emigrant camps to trade or beg food.

After three difficult days progressing upriver they would approach Independence Rock, an enormous tortoise-shaped landmark rising 155 feet from the north bank of the Sweetwater River. Perhaps Brother Gatian or one of his companions followed the practice initiated by earlier emigrants of carving or painting their initials or names on this gray rock dubbed ten years earlier by Father De Smet, the missionary, as "The Great Registry of the Desert."

Dangerously high levels of alkali in the scarce pools of water in the area caused some problems in providing for both human and animal needs for some days.

Continuing southwest the emigrant trail eventually led through the Sweetwater Valley to South Pass (7,550 feet). At this summit in the Rocky Mountains the travelers from Indiana were undoubtedly astonished to see snow in the distance and morning frost at their campsites. But when they realized they had crossed the Continental Divide they must have experienced relief in knowing they were over one big hurdle even though they had at least a thousand more very difficult miles to go.

After a day's downhill journey from South Pass to the Little Sandy Creek, the road forked. Sublette's Cutoff continued to the west as a first leg towards Fort Hall in present-day Idaho, the northernmost point on the original California-Oregon Trail. The other fork angled to the southwest to Fort Bridger and beyond to Salt Lake City.

As we have seen, there are no known records telling which of the alternate ways the St. Joseph Company chose. They could have opted to go all the way

*This crossing is a mile or two west of present-day Casper where the Brothers of Holy Cross were to start a new foundation 132 years later in 1982.

to Fort Hall there leaving the Oregon Trail which the California emigrants shared to that point. They then would have turned on a southwesterly route to the headwaters of the Humboldt River in what is now northeastern Nevada. Or they could have by-passed Fort Hall by turning off at Hudspeth's Cutoff which led southwest to the main trail on which the Humboldt would be reached. This route was the one generally favored in 1850.

However, had they turned at the Little Sandy taking the Fort Bridger route they could have continued from that fort southwesterly to Salt Lake City (Utah) using the eastern end of the Hastings Cutoff. They would then have another choice. They could reach the Humboldt either by the so-called Salt Lake Cutoff or continuing on the Hastings Cutoff. The former took a 420-mile swing above the Great Salt Lake in a northwesterly direction across the Wasatch Mountains and very boring flat lands, and the latter would involve a hazardous trail of about 365 miles first crossing very difficult mountain passes and then across a vast waterless desert.

Whichever route the men did take they would have reached the main Humboldt River trail at least by the river's south fork at a point some 265 miles southwest of Fort Hall which brought all the emigrants back on the same road. Exhausted from their months of discomfort and hardship, the emigrants found the Humboldt leg to be extremely trying and generally monotonous. True, there was water and grass not far from the trail, but as Leander Loomis, an emigrant passing this way about three weeks after the men from South Bend, wrote in his diary:

A word for Old Humboldt,--Since reaching this stream, we have been most wonderfully deceived we had picktured to ourselves, one of the most grand and beautiful streams which our country could produce, with beautiful roads runing along its pleasant banks, and abundants of the verry best of feed, and easy to get, but insted of that, we find a crooked muddy stream, with a wide and swampy Bottom so mutch so that it is utterly impossible to get horses in to the river at scarcely any point, the road is oblided to keep out among the hills, the vally being impassible from the fact of its being, so muddy. The road all along this river, is so dusty, that it makestravelling verry disagreeable. As a general thing the dust along this river is from one to 6 or 8 inches deep, being of the verry lightest kind, so that the least wind will stir it up, and almost bling a person. I have seen it so thick that we could not see wagons that were not more than 4 or 5 rods ahead. This is getting a peep at the Elliphant.* 7

*"To see the elephant" was a popular expression of the time referring to the Gold Rush experience with all its supposed excitement and colorful experiences.

The emigrants had to be on constant alert here to prevent the local Paiute Indians from stealing their horses and supplies. In at least a few confrontations with the redmen blood was spilled on both sides, they were told.

Loomis judges that

We have seen more suffering and passed through more hardships since we struck what has been called the beautiful Humboldt, than in all the rest of our Journey, we have had to swim the river or wade through slews, evry day since we struck the river in order to procure grass for our teams.⁸

The lack of good water added to the misery. As one emigrant sardonically expressed his opinion of it:

It is fairly black and thick with mud and filth, but there is one advantage one has in using it-- it helps to thicken the soup.⁹

After struggling with such hardships for the 365 miles from the headwaters of the Humboldt, the emigrants reached the HumboldtSink where the river disappears in extensive marshes. Now one of the worst tests of the entire trip followed as at this point they had to strike off on a sandy road through a waterless, grassless desert stretching south for thirty miles to the Carson River which would then be followed up into the Sierras into California.

One count recorded 9,771 bodies of dead animals seen on this part of the trail and about 3,000 wagons abandoned by emigrants who pushed ahead on foot.¹⁰

Apparently the men from Notre Dame were able to struggle with their animals and wagons through the wooded boulder-strewn trail up one crest, then down and up an even higher one--over eight thousand feet. At times they would have traveled between banks of snow on either side of the road. Near the top they would have passed a pole from which flew an American flag--undoubtedly a welcome sight. Then the nerve-racking descent would be made on the rocky, twisting road which crossed the river three times. At long last after pushing along 155 miles since reaching the Carson River, the party reached its destination--Placerville, one of the important centers of Gold Rush activity.

Once again we have an account written by Brother Gatian with a first entry dated July 17, 1850 at some unspecified campsite. This would be four and a half months since their departure from Notre Dame.

III. In California.

In his first letter from California Brother Gatian relates the newcomers' first sight of gold dust which was received in payment upon the sale of one of their horses.

The next entry written on July 31 is from the immediate vicinity of Placerville--or Hangtown as it was also known. It contains a puzzling, unexplained statement:

Mr. Menage [i.e., Brother Lawrence] who slept in town last night, returned this morning stating that funds could not be raised for an expedition to the desert & the speculation was consequently given up.

He then goes on to tell what Brother Lawrence found out about the town.

(He) informed us that Hangtown was so called from the fact that when the miners had the law in their own hands, they hanged 3 men on a tree still standing in town. The town is built along a ravine in which there is any quantity of gold, but the best places are claimed by old miners the law allowing 15 ft. square per man.

After reporting the high prices of some things in the town of two thousand residents (e.g., shoeing of a horse, \$16; a doctor's visit \$16), the writer continues:

As a general thing, provisions & wages are eight times as high as in the States. The merchants and traders do the best business in this part of California.

At this point, for economic and other reasons the party felt the necessity of adopting some additional resolutions, namely:

1. To sell all our horses except the stud
2. To have Gregory Campau for cook
3. To try the ravine 3/4 mile from Johnson's establishment
4. To drink no whiskey
5. To eat potatoes once a week
6. To drink coffee in the morning
7. To drink spruce or mountain tea without sugar at noon, & tea at night
8. To send Messrs. Menage & Woodworth to town to buy provisions and boots & sell some ponies.

Brother Gatian concludes:

As soon as Messrs. Menage and Woodworth had left I went to Johnson's & bought 13½ lbs. flour at 22¢, 12 lbs. pork at 35¢, 4 lbs. sugar at 5¢. We then packed our gray horse each man taking a bundle besides, & moved to the site [?] where tomorrow we shall try our fortunes.

If "Johnson's establishment" mentioned above refers to the ranch of one John "Cockeye" Johnson--as it probably does--this would place the company's initial prospecting about six miles northeast of Placerville on the South Fork of the American River or on a small tributary in Johnson's Canyon.

In a letter dated August 4 Brother Lawrence characterized the journey across the country as one full of misery and one "in which to merit heaven."

But, he goes on to say:

We have suffered much. But nothing as compared to that half of the travelers who found themselves without anything to eat and without money. We have been reduced to a ration of rice alone.

He continues by saying he placed himself in the hands of the Blessed Virgin during these past trials and has promised to say 1,000 Aves to obtain her protection in the difficulties to come for "we arrived where human strength was not sufficient."

Furthermore, they are surrounded by infidels who even work on Sundays in their drive to find gold. Also, living conditions and lack of privacy do not permit them to form a community life yet:

Like everyone we have neither tent nor house. Our neighbors are six feet from us . . . We often say our prayers in bed so as to avoid scandal and be mocked.

As to the business of finding gold or making money otherwise, there is already a hint of difficulty and uncertainty.

I have seen a man hire himself for a dollar a day. On Friday, two men dug up \$600 in one day a half-mile from us. If we realized \$200 we would be in business. We would be able to make money. . . . Newcomers who have no money are obliged to work on the diggings of others and often find no gold. The water is too high on the river. The other terrain does not pay.

So, apparently the search for gold by the men from Indiana started on August 1. It probably did not take long for the novice miners to learn that working a claim with the use of pan, shovel, rocker, or long tom was a back-breaking, exhausting process often producing but meager results.

They may first have tried the rocker, or cradle, an oblong wooden box about three feet long mounted on rockers. The gravel hopefully containing gold was thrown onto a sieve on its top. The operator crouched by it and rocked with one hand while pouring pails of water onto it with the other. Strained through an "apron" the water ran out of the rocker's lower end leaving gold-bearing sediment on the riffles (bars) nailed along the open-ended bottom of the contrivance. Meanwhile, a second man was digging more dirt while a third carried bucketloads to the cradle. Such a three-man team could wash an average of a hundred bucketsful a day.

Perhaps they soon graduated to the long tom operated on the same principle as the rocker. A long tom consisted of an inclined trough twelve or more feet long ending in a riddle (a sheet of perforated iron) placed over a riffle box. A team of six or eight men could wash four to five hundred

bucketsful of dirt a day. In either system the final washing was usually done in hand-held miners' pans.

Furthermore, Brother Gatian wrote on September 15:

Gold is plenty but not uniformly distributed. It is hid in the ground and must be dug out only by dint of hard work & untiring perseverance. A man may in half a day dig a hole which will make his fortune; another may toil for a month & be unable to pay his board. Moreover miners cannot dig wherever they find gold. They must work in the neighborhood of water, so that mining is generally confined to the beds of rivers, streams, and canyons. When the latter are dry or when water is troublesome, the diggings must be given up. From this fact comes the distinction between Dry and Wet Diggings, the former being usually worked in the rainy season, and the latter in the Dry seasons. Men with capital, dam rivers or throw up the dirt in the dry ravines and then wait for the rainy season to wash. But poor strapped newcomers must obey the seasons & circumstances and watch opportunities of getting claims. Old miners hold the best claims. The cream is gone; ravines are being turned over for the third and fourth time. There is scarcely an inch of ground not already dug. Business is brisk but men are not wanted. The conclusion . . . is that for the future, people ought to stay at home. Only the smartest & luckiest of emigrants can get along and make a fortune. . . . Hundreds of new miners that have come by land, pass through the State & go directly to San Francisco in order to get passage home. An immense number of the emigrants that have come by sea, back out & start for home. Many foolish, avaricious old miners who last year made a good pile, have spent it this year in prospecting or the building of dams, most of which have been complete failures.

He then gives some news of others from the South Bend area whom Father Sorin would know.

Many South Benders who came last year are now going home with a good fortune. Some from neighboring counties who came through this year are already going home in despair.

Generally the St. Joseph County men of last year are doing well. They are speculating and some have amassed fortunes. I have seen Mr. Good. He is employed in the trading line in the northern mines. He had promised me a place or situation suiting my taste. I shall probably go with him when he returns to Hangtown. He has hired out two or three dozen men to work for him. Garrett, formerly one of my pupils at the Lake owns a Rancho and is doing good business. Coquillard's Company have now all left Capt. Smith, with the exception of Jake & are doing terribly.

Ending on a personal level he reports:

I have not yet had any money worth counting. I had the diarrhea last week and I have not yet fully recovered. Last Friday afternoon my partner and I took up \$15, but I did not work any during the balance of the week. Thus far I have spent in clothing all that I have made except \$9.75.

By November 1 the situation had turned grim. Brother Lawrence wrote a long, rambling letter on that date telling Father Sorin

It is three weeks since I received your letter of June 7, the first we have received up to now. I should have replied before today but I was sick; it was believed I was dying. Mr. Lacass * was sick at the same time. We are getting better but are not able to do anything. Only able to cook for the whole company of which all are sick. The captain and Mr. Gautier [i.e., Brother Justin] are not laid up [?] but are not able to do anything; Mr. Dowling is in danger but we have two doctors who are very skillful and very expensive. The bill will not be less than \$400. We have built a house for the winter and it may be necessary to sell it to pay this.

Mr. Gautier works at his trade [i.e., cobbling] and does very well. If he will only have enough work! When the rain will commence, I hope that he will be furnished with work. He charges the same price for half-soles here that he charged at the Lake for a pair of boots. . . . This sickness will ruin us. It is an affliction from God which we must take as a punishment for our sins. This country is so bad; its water is so bad that it makes one vomit when one takes any. The old Californians do not drink it straight but mix something with it. We have a cemetery at our door and it is not the only one in this place. Someone dies every day without fail.

At this point Brother Lawrence inserts a public incident amidst his his account of personal woes.

Last week a man from the town who was winning at cards had a dispute. Someone struck him twice and killed him. The next day his brother took revenge. He gathered everybody together. The guilty man was taken and hanged. Authorities [?] wanted to interfere but time was lost. The mob was the master. Unfortunately the assassin was a Catholic. He said he had killed two people before. He also said if he had six bullets in his pistol he would have killed six more.

Despite all the troubles Brother Lawrence claims he is not completely discouraged. He engages in a little speculation. He says if he had the capital he would like to buy cows in Sacramento and sell milk at \$4.00 a gallon. The other men could raise the feed. In that way they could clear \$50 a day which would be enough to feed everyone at the Lake. However, he points out, the big stumbling block to the Brothers undertaking such a business is the lack of a priest to serve their spiritual needs. As he puts it:

All these calculations are easy to make but the continual pain of thinking we would be obliged to pass all the time without a priest! Ten years are not so long at the Lake as this little bit of time here.

And he still has hopes of finding gold:

The gold in California will not be exhausted in fifty years. Only the cream will be gone. One cannot dig in a single place without finding gold. On the mountains one can take the earth, wash it, and find gold.

* William Lacass from the South Bend area joined the St. Joseph Company after it arrived in California.

He concludes with a poignant expression of missing "the Lake" and with another mention of the fact that Brother Placidus and Michael Dowling are very sick.

Just nine days later on November 10 Brother Lawrence wrote a short letter to Father Sorin to inform him that Brother Placidus died on November 6.

You will be able to understand how painful it was for us to see him die without a priest, but it was useless for us to think of it for one was not closer than San Francisco [about 150 miles away]. He had a burning fever; he did not speak two words for three days before dying; he had been sick eight days and had a completely edifying death ending like a candle.

Brother Lawrence then asks Father Sorin to give \$100 in stipends for Masses for the deceased which the Company will pay back when they have the money. He concludes:

I wish to speak to you of different things but my strength does not permit me.

One of the things Brother Lawrence did not mention in his brief message was the exact location of their cabin and the neighboring cemetery in which Brother Placidus was probably buried. A search of the existing but incomplete cemetery records of the area have not provided this information. Brother Placidus, incidentally, was thirty-eight years old at his death.

In his letter of November 24 Brother Gatian also refers to the sickness prevailing in the mines:

"I'm sick" "I am unable to work" "One of my acquaintances just died"-- is the talk of nearly every group in town or out of it. The St. Joseph Company have not been spared. Wm. Lacass and John Menage have been in danger of death & Brother Placidus is gone, I hope, to a better world. Doctors' bill is not far from six hundred dollars. I have also been very sick for four weeks & have run \$60 in debt. The majority of miners are as in the case of the St. Joseph Co., unable to work & in debt.

William Lacass, the newest member of the Company, died sometime between the date of this letter and January 1851. Details of his passing are not known.

In his letter Brother Gatian also reports more discouraging facts about local conditions.

The diggings in this vicinity scarcely pay board to the majority of new miners & a great many are merely trying to make enough to take them home. I have worked all week & made only two days' board. Next Monday I shall go 65 miles south towards the Cosumnes River with my partner who has discovered good mines in the late expedition against the Indians. We will be in some danger from the redskins & we will have to sleep out

in the cold rain until we have put up a house, for the rainy season has fairly set in.

Fleas and lice are in the greatest prosperity in this country & very few miners can get ahead of them.

Gambling is the great occupation of everybody during leisure hours. No group of miners is without a deck of cards. At the grocery of the St. Joseph Co. they are going to have a table for the better accommodation of players. I gamble also for the fun of it, but I hope I will never risk any money. However, I have won a mince pie from Capt. Woodworth & half a pound walnuts from Wm. Lacass playing seven-up.

It would be a great charity in you to endeavor to keep people from coming to California. Of all those who came through this last spring, there is not more than one out of every three hundred that would not wish himself home again. One tenth of the emigrants die in California; not more than one out of a hundred will make anything. Those who came through last year & the preceding spring must not be believed: things have changed and the mines are exhausted.

It would appear that some time between Brother Gatian's letters of September 15 and November 24, 1850, he withdrew from the Congregation of Holy Cross for in the latter he writes concerning his agreement with the St. Joseph Company:

If my feeble body, which is now a mere skeleton and the picture of death, can go through the hardships I have already mentioned, and if the Indians spare my life, I hope that I do well on Jackson Creek. I would like to have you exact a certain sum in the latter case, and to set me free instead of requiring that fulfillment of my agreement, for I want to go home to the States as soon as possible.

This young man's action came as no surprise to Father Sorin in view of his earlier plans as mentioned in the Chronicles. Just what formalities, or if any, had to be fulfilled to release him from the Congregation is uncertain. The record of professions at Notre Dame shows that on August 21, 1848, Brother Gatian vowed "obedience forever" and "poverty for one year." After that date no further renewals are indicated in the register. In a letter sent on August 15, 1851, from Shasta City about 250 miles northwest of Placerville, Urban Monsimer--as he now signed himself--thanks Father Sorin for the latter's letter of June 29, 1851, and for the "amabilities & gratefully received grants & dispensations which it contains." The term "dispensation" here may refer to financial responsibilities regarding St. Joseph Company.

He continues:

I must say with a deep regret and a heartfelt sorrow for the disappointments which my frankness may have caused you &, in spite of the inconceivable & ineffaceable attachment which I have for your Institution & my inexplicable love of the apprentices, that you shall never see me again a member unless my heart should change completely and as a man I do not know what it is to go back. I must go ahead. I am not impious, thanks to Mary, & as far as I can

I am a practical Catholic, abstaining from whoring, gambling and drinking, from swearing, from meat on Fridays & mining on Sundays. I do not know of anyone abstaining from all these things with the exception of my companion, the constant servant of Mary, Gregory Campau & his adopted father Old Man Furlong. I must confess, however, that I have often done my trading, mending and washing on Sundays.

He also states in this letter that Gregory Campau, and then Captain Woodworth and Michael Dowling had left the Company without giving dates. It must have been some months earlier because by this date the whole project had been terminated, and Brother Lawrence (and presumably Brother Justin) had been back at Notre Dame for over a month already. He had had little contact with the Company since withdrawing from it.

I have heard but once of Menage & Co. It seems they were then reduced to the last extremity.

Writing from Sacramento on March 26, 1851, Brother Lawrence reports that he and Michael Dowling have been transporting goods from there to Placerville-- a distance of sixty miles--at five cents a pound. During the week previous to his writing they made \$100 but do not do so well all the time. However, they are doing well enough during the current month and hope that "St. Joseph will protect them during April." He informs the Superior that the captain and Brother Justin continue digging for gold on the South Fork of the American River four miles from Placerville.

The writer continues in an optimistic tone and does not ask permission to return to Indiana. However, perhaps at this point Father Sorin, realizing the hopelessness of the situation, instructed Brother Lawrence to come back for by July 6 the Brother is again at Notre Dame. Details of the trip are unknown. Brother Justin also returned, but there is no record that he traveled with Brother Lawrence or went back at some other time.

Of course, Brother Lawrence did not have the hoped-for riches to present to Father Sorin. Any gold they did mine must have been used for living and medical expenses in California. The waste book (i.e., the account book) states that upon his arrival, Brother Lawrence settled accounts as follows:

May 25	Brother received \$299.25
	2 yoke Oxen & Waggon \$275.00
	Personal expenses of 3 Bros. in California \$46.15
26	Settled with Mr. Cowdrie to an amount of \$88.76
	Brother Lawrence sold to Capt. Woodworth in California goods to an amount \$261.60
	Captain's personal expenses \$57.40
July 7	To one ox lost by accident in California \$40.00
	To amount of expense to come home \$376.33

IV. Epilogue.

Brothers Lawrence and Justin resumed their old occupations. The former became one of the best-known farmers in northern Indiana and as steward at Notre Dame was highly regarded by local businessmen who dealt with him. In June 1867 the Council chose him to begin the operation of the farm at Ames, Iowa, but the appointment must have been canceled for he remained at the university until his death following a three-month illness at 58 years of age, on April 4, 1873. On that occasion Father Sorin, now superior general of the Congregation, devoted an entire circular letter praising his old companion and right-hand man. He summed up his feelings thus:

. . . if anyone is to be named as having contributed more than others by earnest and persevering exertions, both of mind and body, to the development and prosperity of Notre Dame, if I did not do it here, the public voice would declare it, and name Brother Lawrence.

Brother Justin met death calmly at Notre Dame after a sickness of only a very few days on December 20, 1870, at the age of sixty-nine. Father Sorin wrote of him:

Who was ever offended or disedified by Brother Justin? Ah! rather let us ask who does not readily acknowledge the beauty of his childlike innocence, his unceasing devotedness, his promptitude and unconcealed happiness in obedience, his regularity as a Religious, and his real eagerness to oblige and give satisfaction to everyone around him? Indeed, in this he was particular to a fault. Many of us will remember with edification how greatly distressed he sometimes seemed to feel when led to fear that he had not given full satisfaction, in spite of his good will.

Brother Justin's last years were spent at Notre Dame and St. Mary's as shoemaker and porter.

It is interesting to note that no mention is made in the obituaries of these two Religious of the sixteen months spent on the California expedition.

No record has been located to indicate when (or if) Captain John Woodworth returned to South Bend or how long he may have stayed there. His family is not listed in the 1860 Census for St. Joseph County. The family may have moved to Ohio as the student ledger for 1862-63 has a reference to Cincinnati on the account for Thomas Woodworth, the captain's third son.

Likewise, no record of either Gregory Campau or Michael Dowling returning to South Bend has been found. However, it is known that the former was still mining in California as late as the spring of 1858.

Urban Monsimer--the former Brother Gatian--continued to correspond with Father Sorin after leaving the Congregation. Some of these letters reveal interesting insights on the economy, government, and religion in California; others are of a personal nature. He continued in mining, at first in northern California prospecting near One Horse Town in the Shasta area, and then back in Kelsey near Placerville. His letter of April 23, 1860, however, is written from San Francisco. After a long discussion of why he thinks it would be a good idea for Father Sorin to establish Holy Cross in that city, he makes the startling statement that

I have lost all hope of recovery. Doctors have given me up & I am becoming daily weaker. I weigh but 105 pounds. My father wishes to see me before I die, & it is for this reason I undertake a long voyage at the eleventh hour of my life. . . . pray for me that I may not die during the voyage & that I may carry my cross patiently.

He embarked on his long, tiring voyage on May 5 most likely via the Isthmus of Panama route. He reached France but soon after, on July 29, 1860, he died, a bachelor, at the very farm of Préau, Saulges, where he had been born only thirty-four years earlier.¹¹

Because of his independent action in planning the expedition, Father Sorin continued to receive much criticism from various sources long after the two surviving Brothers had returned from California.

As seen above, the local council at Notre Dame had decided on the project as early as September 28, 1849, but Father Sorin made no effort to obtain approval from Father Basil Moreau, the superior general in France, and the General Council. Later he claimed he wrote to the Superior General in March 1850 on the matter but apparently this letter never reached Le Mans. At any rate, by this time the men were already on their way across the prairie.

Just when Father Moreau received word is not certain, but in a letter to Father Sorin on June 13 he wrote:

I approve also the nomination of Brother John to the Minor Chapter in place of Brother Lawrence until the return of the latter whose absence has not been approved by my council.

About a week later Father Louis Barroux who had gone to France to solicit funds from the Propagation of the Faith and elsewhere berates Father Sorin:

Our fears that all the money [a sum previously obtained from the Propagation of the Faith] went to pay for the trip of the California colony--this news saddens everybody and makes us blush.

One blushes to see Religious placed in the ranks of all the greedy who run after gold; one is humiliated by these proceedings. . . Where to get the money now for the expense of the return of the colony should it arrive with empty hands?

By September 30, 1850, Father Moreau had indirectly heard some explanation, for on that date he wrote Father Sorin:

I learned only through your letter to Father Vérité, my dear Sorin, the motives of your California expedition and until then I did not have any knowledge of it for I had not received your letter of the month of March. Following your account I can no longer condemn you and I am writing a few words to Brother Gatian to lead him to come to an understanding with me sooner or later.

On April 9, 1851, Father Barroux again expressed his displeasure with Father Sorin:

He [Father Moreau] condemns the sending of the Brothers to California; the death of Brother Placidus is a severe charge against you. The reason of this expedition which you give in saying that you did not know what else to do with these subjects disgusted everybody, one finds neither charity nor humanity to sacrifice these subjects whom you have exposed to dying without the sacraments to find gold with the adventurers and the dregs of society who people this California.

But this was far from the last word from France. At the General Chapter in Le Mans in August 1851 the following was written into the minutes:

Further, the General Chapter does not give any local superior the right to give by himself an extraordinary mission to any of his subjects without the agreement of the Reverend Father Rector; this is why it openly condemns the California expedition, and Reverend Father Rector demands that he be given news of the members of this expedition who are still alive and he be informed as to how he may correspond with them.

When Father Moreau officially announced to the Congregation through his Circular Letter of December 8, 1851, that Brother Placidus had died over a year before, he added this comment:

The death of Brother Placidus caused me all the more grief because I had not been informed that he had been sent to California. I would never have approved such an undertaking.

It is not known what Father Sorin's reactions were to these various criticisms, but one letter that must have borne a particularly sharp sting came from his friend, Sister St. Francis Xavier, the Sister of Providence who took passage on the same ship that brought Father Sorin and the six Brothers to America in 1841.

She recalls:

They [i.e., the Brothers] were so happy, so happy to be near you and the good Brother Vincent, our companion of the ship Iowa. I remember your saying: "I would like the ship to have an accident which would cause us to throw all

our trunks and supplies into the sea, and we would have only the Cross of Jesus left." Oh, you said that with a sincere heart; you were far from thinking that one day you would send those dear children, who like you, gloried in poverty, to look for gold.

Their trip from New York to Vincennes was indeed dangerous, but they had their father with them. . . . But today, they do not have a priest to console them, nor a priest to absolve them.

This week, twenty-two men from our area [i.e., Terre Haute] are leaving for that wretched country. When we told them about the dangers to which their souls would be exposed, they answered: "The Brothers from South Bend are going there, why shouldn't we?"

A few days later the Sister wrote again to beg forgiveness for these and other remarks made in her first letter.

There is no evidence that during the remainder of the years until his death in 1893 that Father Sorin willingly recalled the ill-fated assignment on which he sent the four Brothers in 1850.

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²Chapman's History of Saint Joseph County, Indiana. Chicago, Chas. C. Chapman & Co., 1880, p. 543.

³Leeper, David Rohrer, op. cit., p. xv.

⁴Howard, Timothy Edward, A History of St. Joseph County, - 2 vols. Chicago, The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907, Vol. I, p. 629.

⁵Stewart, George R., The California Trail, New York, McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1962., p. 301

⁶Loomis, Leander, A Journal of the Birmingham Emigrating Company, Salt Lake City, Legal Printing Co., 1928.

⁷Ibid., pp. 94-95

⁸Ibid., p. 104

⁹Jackson, Donald Dale, Gold Dust, Knopf Publishing Company, 1980, p. 296.

¹⁰Stewart, George R., op. cit., p. 301

¹¹Letter of Charles Lemarié, C.S.C., Angers, France, to author, February 8, 1984.

Archives :

The original Minutes of the Minor Chapter, the Register of Professions, Ledgers, and Father Sorin's Chronicles are in the Archives of the Indiana Province, Notre Dame Indiana. Likewise, the originals of the letters written to Father Sorin by Brother Gatian and Brother Lawrence are in these Archives with the exception of Brother Lawrence's letter of March 5, 1850 a transcription of which is included in the "Vanier Collection" microfilm in the Archives of the University of Notre Dame.

A transcription of the Agreement of the St. Joseph Company is also on the above microfilm. The Waste Book and the Notre Dame Student Ledger are also in the Archives of the University.

Various personnel files and records and Brother Aidan's Extracts are in the Archives of the Midwest Province, Notre Dame, Indiana.

The original of Father Moreau's letter is in the General Archives of the Congregation of Holy Cross, Rome.

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