R Crawford, Billie.

Diary, 1878.

One folder, photocopies.

This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri. If you would like more information, please contact us at shsresearch@umsystem.edu.

This is a typescribed copy of a diary of an overland journey from St. Clair County, Missouri, to Camp Verde, Arizona, 29 May to 17 September 1878. The travelers included Billy Crawford, Alfred L. Gash, George Fain, their families, and a few neighbors. Related genealogical material is included with the diary.

The emigrant party from St. Clair County traveled under the direction of Alfred Longmire Gash, wagon master of the party and father-in-law of Billie Crawford, keeper of the diary. Crawford began keeping the diary on 29 April 1878, when the party “moved out on the prairie,” and continued daily entries until the arrival in Arizona four months later. Their route led them through Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico, following the Santa Fe trail to Santa Fe, thence through Fort Wingate, New Mexico, and Navajo Springs and Stoneman’s Lake to Camp Verde, north of Phoenix, Arizona. The diary describes the usual tribulations of western emigrants such as wagons which needed constant repair, sore-footed livestock and bad water. The young men in the party enjoyed their first experiences of hunting antelope and buffalo, and took time from the trail to climb the first mountains they encountered. Daily progress was not what was planned, and there were several instances of ill humor and discontent among the members of the party. Diarist Crawford also noted many encounters with other parties along the trail, including drovers with their herds headed east from Texas, garrison soldiers at Fort Union, New Mexico, Mexican shepherders with their flocks, and bands of Navajo Indians. The meetings were invariably friendly. Problems arose only when the immigrants attempted to graze or water their livestock in areas where settlers had already located.

Crawford’s diary is an interesting account of overland travel to the Southwest in the last quarter of the 19th century. Unfortunately, Crawford’s diary does not explain the motivation or expectations of the travelers. The diary ends on 17 September 1878, with the entry “reached the Verde River all out of provisions.” There is no information on the fortunes of the immigrants in their new home. The traveling parties included family groups with women and children, but they are not described in any detail. Genealogical information supplied by descendants will help the researcher identify the individuals mentioned in the diary. The typescript was prepared by Eva L. (Gash) Guernsey. The location of the original diary is not known.

Shelf List

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