

Other emigrants died from accidents. Inexperienced around animals and wagons, some were trampled or killed by falls. Others drowned during river crossings. Families stood on the banks watching helplessly as their loved ones were swept away. Still others were killed during fierce lightning storms. The graves along the Trail were a constant reminder of how dangerous the journey was.



*Sarah Marshall - May 11, 1852*

I walked ten miles today. We left behind two wagons. The people were very sick. I'm glad we saw Courthouse Rock. It is beautiful and looks just like a castle. We carved our names at the top. All we see now are dead oxen or graves. There are lots of bones shining in the hot sun. Henry and Mrs. Harris have counted 98 graves. She wears black and just sits there counting. Tom calls her Grim Reaper. I'm going to mail my drawing of Courthouse Rock to Emily.

*Harriet Marshall - May 22, 1852*

Henry's friend died today. He was well, he got sick, and then he died, all in three hours. Poor Henry went from counting graves to digging them. I worry so about our family.

*William Marshall - June 3, 1852*

At last we are at Chimney Rock. Chimney Rock is better than Courthouse Rock! It's like a huge spiral going up into the sky. Henry and Tom tried to climb it but couldn't. I felt like a bug standing next to it. It's almost four hundred feet high. We'll rest here for a few days. Then it's on to Fort Laramie. We'll all be happy to see some civilization.

*Sarah Marshall - June 4, 1852*

I'm glad to rest here at Chimney Rock. It is so tall, and it looks like a giant pen. I drew a picture of it. I'll send it to Emily when we get to Fort Laramie. I hope there are some letters there for me. I am tired of just talking to the sheep during the day. Elizabeth, the girl who herds the animals with me, only seems to want to talk to Tom.



William Marshall - June 10, 1852

We've made it to Fort Laramie. We're a third of the way there! I have to repair the wagon and replace our axle. We lost two oxen and will buy two from a family turning back. We need strong oxen and a lighter load to make it up the Rockies. I'm glad we don't need more supplies. Prices here are too high. I still have money for the ferries. Harriet and Sarah got letters. A man was killed when his wagon fell on him. His wife will go on. Next is Independence Rock. We will leave the plains behind us. Mountains and rivers lie ahead.



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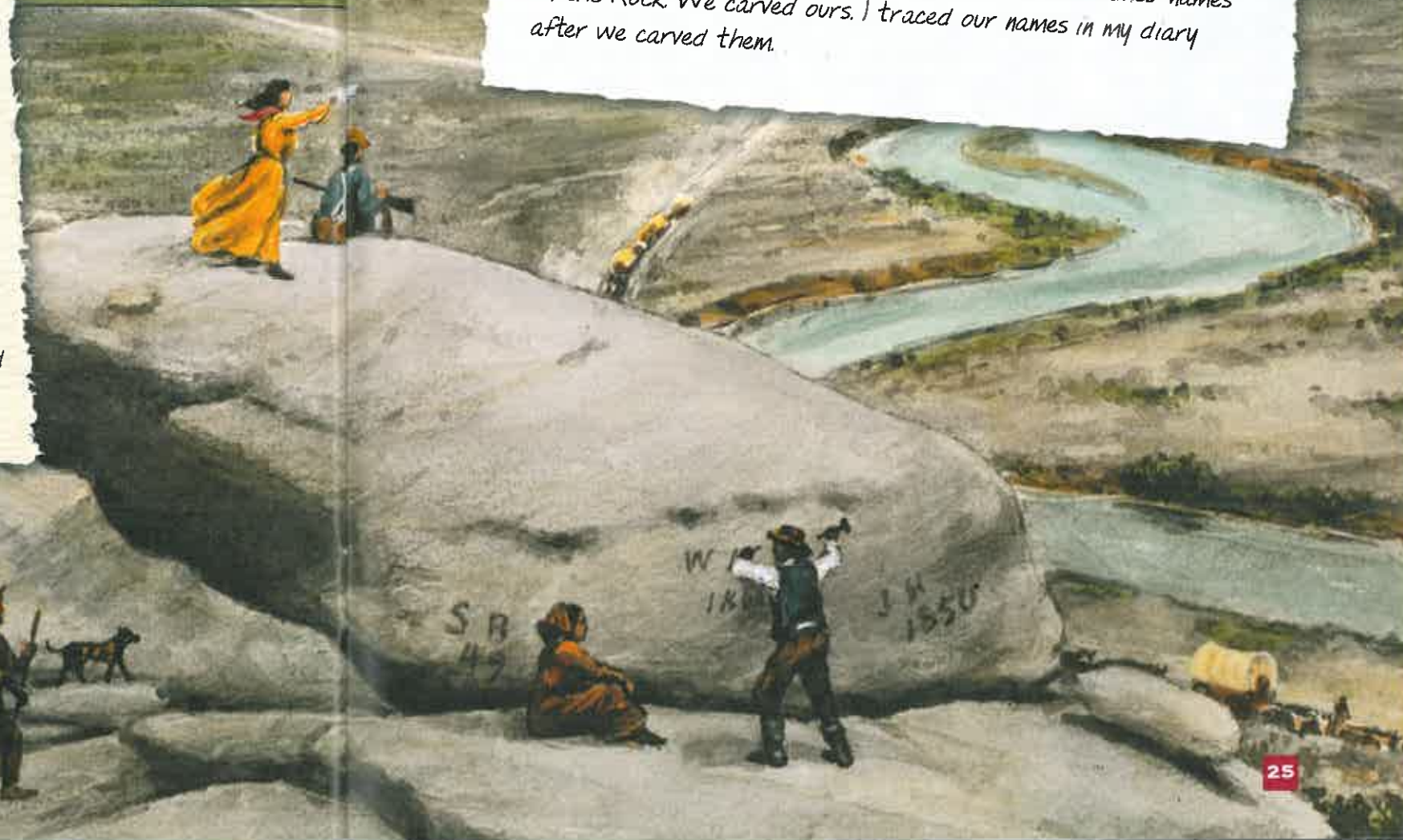
Yokes were used to harness oxen to the wagons.

Sarah Marshall - June 13, 1852

Henry and Grim Reaper counted 20 more graves. Mama has been sick. She has chills and a fever. I give her quinine and cold cloths. Fever has hit our wagons fast. Papa says it's because of bad water and all the rain. We must boil the water. The rain finally stopped today. Grim Reaper looks after Mama. I hope we all make it to Independence Rock.

June 16, 1852

We all made it to Independence Rock! Mama is better. We almost lost her. We found Aunt Liddy and Uncle James' names on the Rock. We carved ours. I traced our names in my diary after we carved them.



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*Harriet Marshall - July 4, 1852*

*We have reached South Pass and are half way to Oregon!  
Tomorrow we say good-bye to many people, even our Tom. Tom's  
love Elizabeth is going to California with her family. He's going  
with her to search for gold. I will miss him and pray that he'll  
be safe and happy. There's a party tonight with three fiddlers.  
We will sing and dance. It's time to have a little fun. Who  
knows what lies ahead?*

South Pass was one of the most important landmarks on the Oregon Trail. A valley twenty miles wide, South Pass allowed the emigrants to travel through the mountains rather than climb over them. South Pass also was the fork in the Trail where the emigrants decided whether to head northwest to the Oregon Territory or southwest to California.

The emigrants had to get through the mountains before it snowed. At South Pass they heard the story of the Donner party. In 1846 this group of settlers was traveling west when they became stranded by early snows in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Most of the party died. No emigrant wanted to suffer that fate. Everyone was anxious to continue the journey and stay ahead of the snows.



# MAKING FRIENDS

The emigrants heard many frightening tales about the Native American nations, such as the Pawnee, Sioux, Shoshone, and Bannock who lived along the Oregon Trail. Many of these tales were false. Wagon trains were not regularly attacked by the Native Americans.

Native American trails formed the paths that the emigrants followed on their journey westward. Some Native Americans worked as guides, using their skills and canoes to help emigrants safely cross the rivers and mountains.



*William Marshall - July 18, 1852*

*Last night a few Nez Percé came to our camp. They were friendly. Some in our party reached for their rifles, but the wagon master kept the peace. The Nez Percé looked at our horses. They had an extra horse with them. I traded coffee, a silver belt buckle, and tobacco for the horse. It will replace Henry's horse that died. Henry claims the horse's name is Running Wind. Just hope the horse makes it to Oregon. Snake River is next.*

By the time the emigrants reached Fort Hall on the Snake River, many were running low on supplies, and their animals were dead or dying. Once the emigrants realized the Native Americans were not going to attack their wagon train, they bartered with them. They exchanged clothing and tools for fresh food, herbs, moccasins, and other useful goods.

The Marshalls were able to barter for much needed items with the Nez Percé. The Nez Percé also helped them to cross a difficult and frightening part of the Trail.



*Harriet Marshall - July 25, 1852*

Today, the Nez Percé helped us cross a narrow part of the Snake River. This was our first time in a canoe. Sarah was scared, but I felt safe. We paid \$2 to the Nez Percé to guide our horses and cattle across the river. They swam beside the animals. We lost one cow in the crossing, but all the other animals made it safely. Sarah was hoping some sheep would be lost. There are three islands in the river. The Indians showed us how to use them as stepping stones. Some in our party who crossed on their own lost wagons, animals, or even loved ones.

*Sarah Marshall - July 26, 1852*

The canoe ride was scary, but we didn't tip over. Some wagons did tip over and were lost. Two boys were lost, also. Water just swirled up and got them. We couldn't do anything, I'm glad we had the Nez Percé to help us. The banks of the river were covered with dead cattle that had washed up. Henry is riding his new horse. He says the horse rides like the wind.

*August 13*

I walked ten miles in the rain. Mama tried to stay dry, but the canvas leaks. Henry rode his horse wearing Papa's huge coat. It kept him dry but he sure looked funny. I hope Mama doesn't get sick. We spent the night drying things around the fire.





*Sarah Marshall - August 19, 1852*

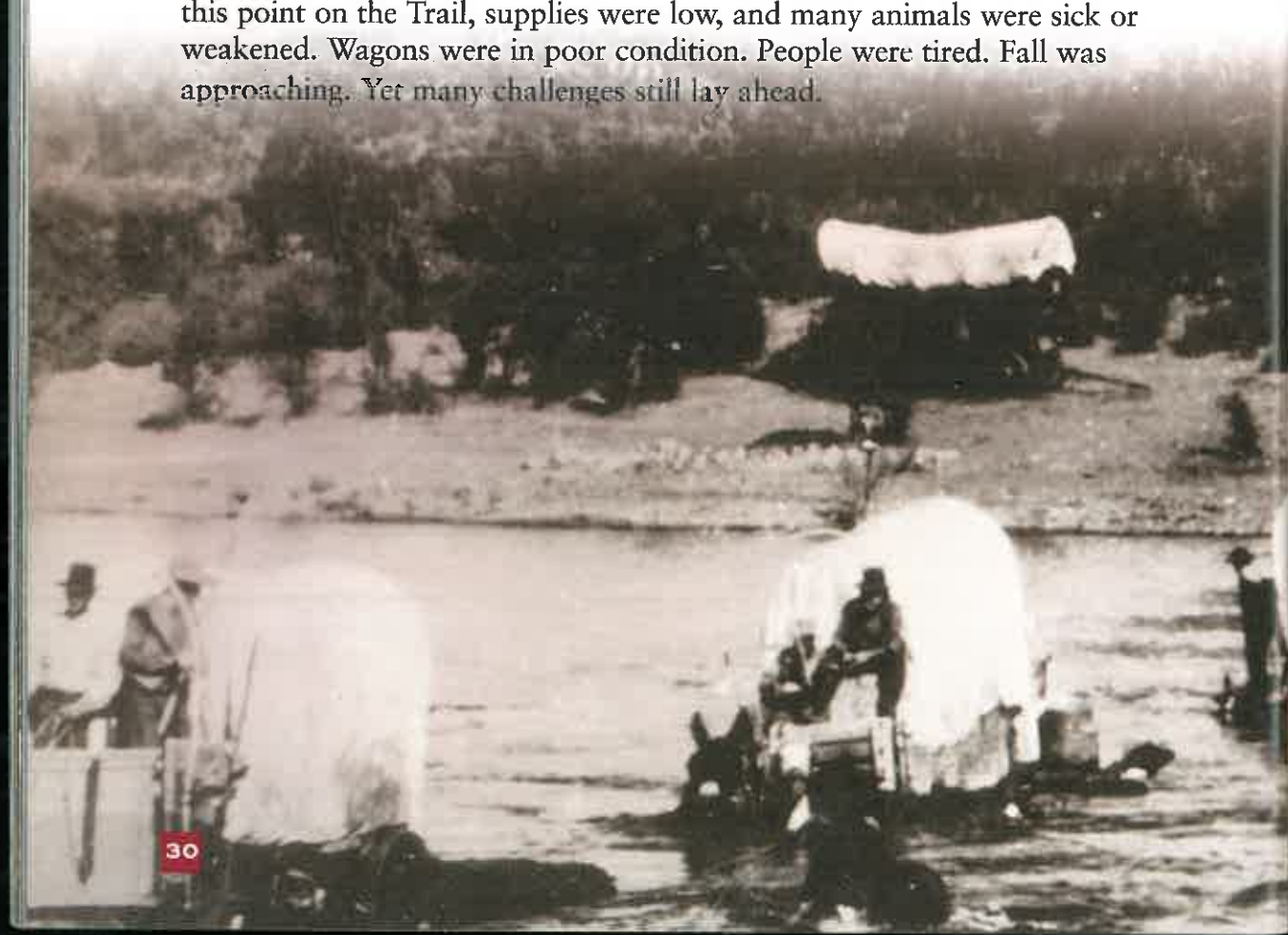
*We reached Fort Boise and stopped for a short rest. We must make it across the Cascade Mountains before the snows. We had to stop for a few days on the Trail while Mama was sick. She is fine now. The wagon master gave dad the route, and we were able to catch up. We still have 400 miles to go!*

Native Americans helped many of the emigrants cross the Snake River. Although crossing the river was the fastest way to Fort Boise, it was also the most dangerous. The currents of the Snake River were strong, and many wagons and animals were lost. So many emigrants lost animals in the Snake River that it was called the "cattle graveyard."

The next stop on the Trail was Fort Boise. Fort Boise was plagued by floods. Three years after the Marshalls visited it, Fort Boise was gone. By this point on the Trail, supplies were low, and many animals were sick or weakened. Wagons were in poor condition. People were tired. Fall was approaching. Yet many challenges still lay ahead.

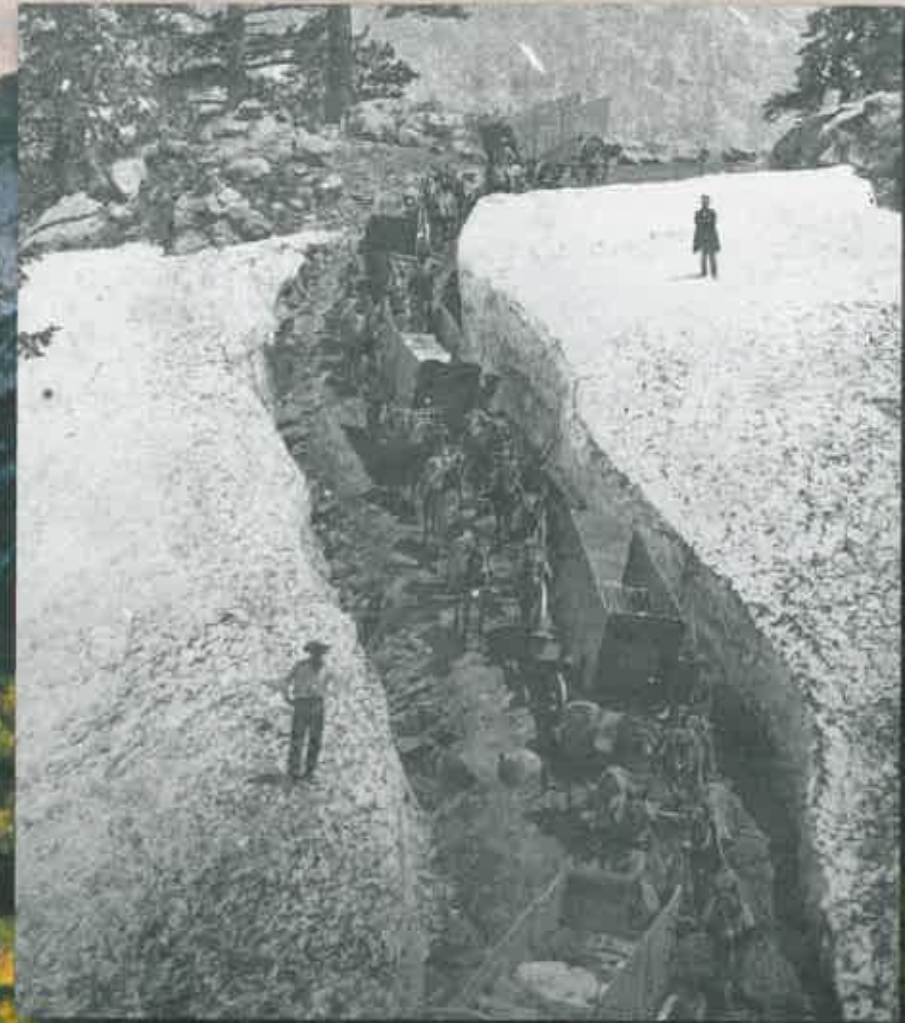
# FORDING the RIVER

The emigrants were now on the last leg of their long, hard journey. They had reached the end of the Trail, blocked by the Cascade Mountains. Here, at a place called The Dalles, emigrants had to pass down the wide Columbia River, full of whirlpools and rapids. Its banks were high and rocky. Few could afford the ferry that traveled down the river. Those without the fare had to float their wagons down the river.



Some emigrants chose to go through the Cascade Mountains on the Barlow Road. This route had steep, narrow paths covered with roots, rocks, and boulders. The emigrants used ropes and pulleys to pull their wagons up and over the mountains. Some wagons slipped out of the pulleys, crashing down hillsides and sometimes crushing emigrants.

The Marshalls had saved \$16.00 to pay for the ferry. But they had to wait two weeks before they could get onto the ferry. There were too many people and not enough boats.



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*William Marshall - September 8, 1852*

We sent out search parties for some people lost in the mountains. Hope they find them. We will wait for the ferry. Luckily we have the money. One family from our wagon train was lost when their wagon sank in the river. Relatives watched but could do nothing. Rocks seem to appear out of nowhere. We eat, sleep, sing songs, and wait. We can use the rest.

*Sarah Marshall - September 11, 1852*

Our campground is like a small village next to the river. We watch people trying to get across. Fights break out. I am just glad I don't have to walk. And there's no sheep to herd! We sold them poor things. Some were lost crossing the river. I feel bad.

*Harriet Marshall - September 17*

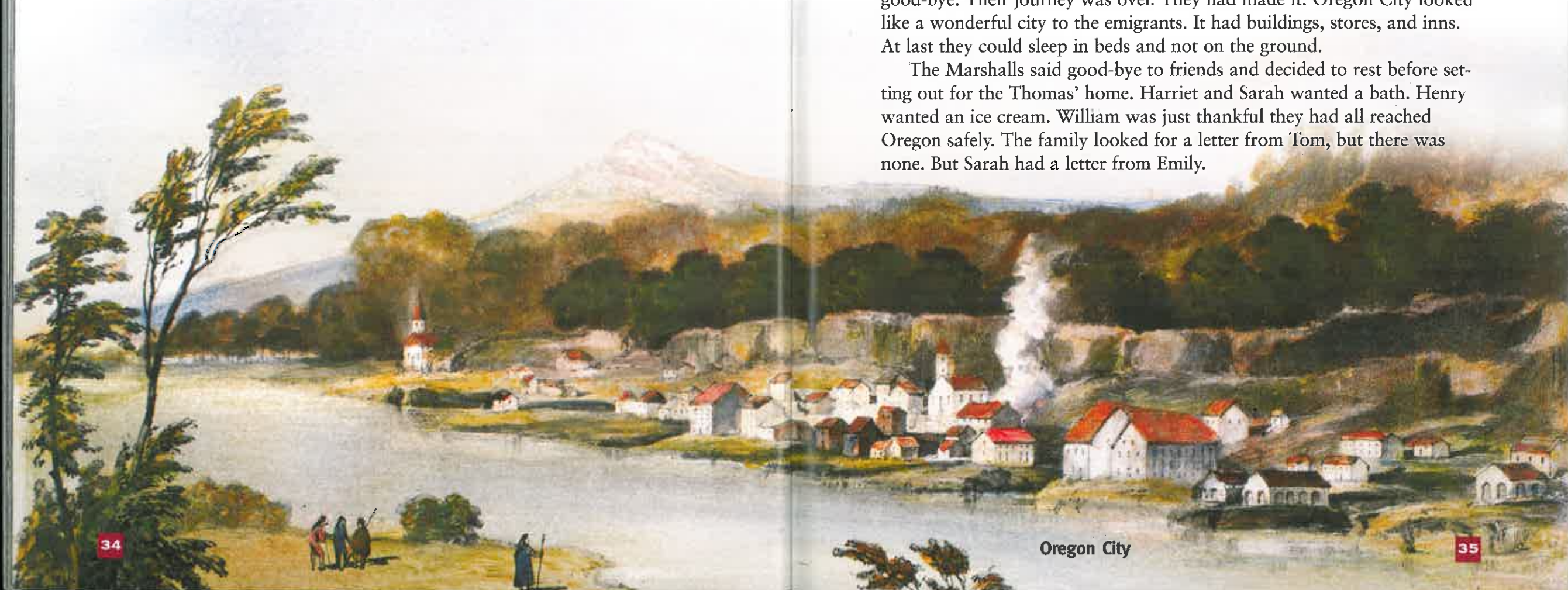
Yesterday two brothers fought over where to cross the river. They were so mad they cut their wagon in half. Both just took off with half a wagon. It was sad and funny. Tempers are short now that we are so close. I'm thankful for the rest. Sarah's feet are raw. Henry is forbidden to go near the river. I hope we can get on the ferry soon.

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The Marshalls finally took the ferry down the Columbia River. During the trip, the oxen all shuffled to one side and nearly tipped the ferry. William struggled to keep the animals quiet and calm. Harriet held on to Henry to keep him from falling off the ferry. Sarah clutched her diary and crossed her fingers. But at last they landed. They had little money left, but they had arrived in Oregon Territory near the Willamette Valley.

The weather was rainy. But to the emigrants, the land looked lush and green. They gathered their belongings, hitched up their wagons, and set off on the last few miles to Oregon City. Once there, the emigrants would search for family and then settle down.

On the Trail the emigrants had an expression, "seeing the elephant," which meant that they had suffered hardships or misfortune. Reaching Oregon City meant that the emigrants had finally put the elephant behind them.



## REACHING OREGON CITY

The emigrants moved even faster now. They were desperate to reach Oregon City, claim land, and begin their new lives. Supplies were very low. Water was nearly gone. The emigrants boiled the river water. They did not want to become ill this close to their goal.

Upon reaching Oregon City, the wagon train broke up. Friends said good-bye. Their journey was over. They had made it. Oregon City looked like a wonderful city to the emigrants. It had buildings, stores, and inns. At last they could sleep in beds and not on the ground.

The Marshalls said good-bye to friends and decided to rest before setting out for the Thomas' home. Harriet and Sarah wanted a bath. Henry wanted an ice cream. William was just thankful they had all reached Oregon safely. The family looked for a letter from Tom, but there was none. But Sarah had a letter from Emily.

September 3, 1852  
Sidney, New York

Dear Sarah,

I hope this letter finds you safe. What is Oregon City like? Is it like Albany? Is it a big city or is it tiny like our town? What will your new home be like?

Mama talks about my becoming a teacher. She says I am smart. What do you think? Maybe I could come out to the Oregon Territory and teach.

Life here is just the same. The minister still gives long sermons. Papa pretends to listen. Mama wears a new hat when she can. And of course, she carries her lace handkerchiefs.

There is a new boy in town. He is fourteen. His name is John. His family lives down the road. Mama says he is quite nice. I hope she doesn't have any ideas.

Write soon. I want to hear about your new home. I miss you!

STILL your best friend,  
Emily Smith

October 12, 1852  
Oregon City, Oregon

Dear Emily,

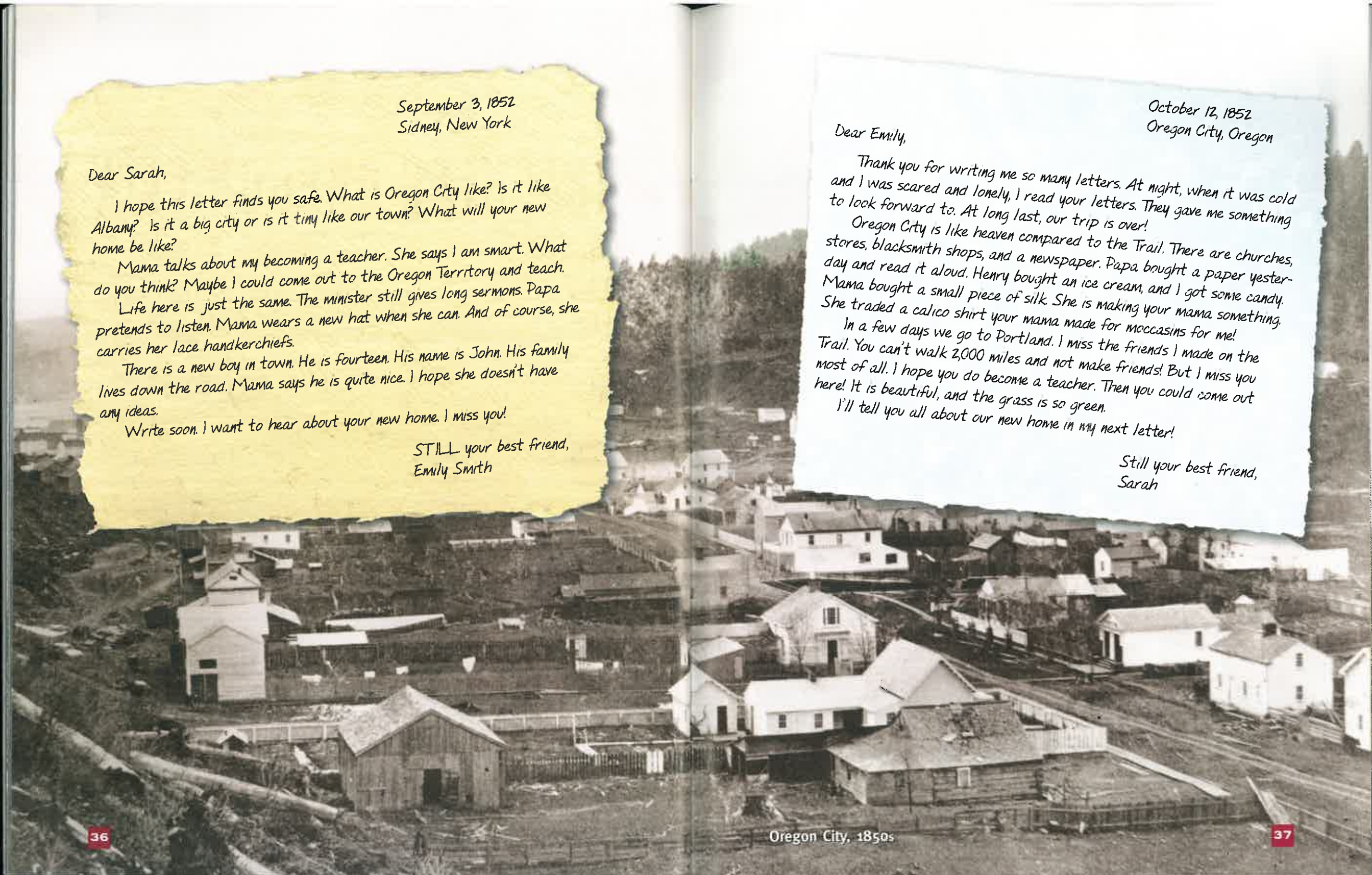
Thank you for writing me so many letters. At night, when it was cold and I was scared and lonely, I read your letters. They gave me something to look forward to. At long last, our trip is over!

Oregon City is like heaven compared to the Trail. There are churches, stores, blacksmith shops, and a newspaper. Papa bought a paper yesterday and read it aloud. Henry bought an ice cream, and I got some candy. Mama bought a small piece of silk. She is making your mama something. She traded a calico shirt your mama made for moccasins for me!

In a few days we go to Portland. I miss the friends I made on the Trail. You can't walk 2,000 miles and not make friends! But I miss you most of all. I hope you do become a teacher. Then you could come out here! It is beautiful, and the grass is so green.

I'll tell you all about our new home in my next letter!

Still your best friend,  
Sarah



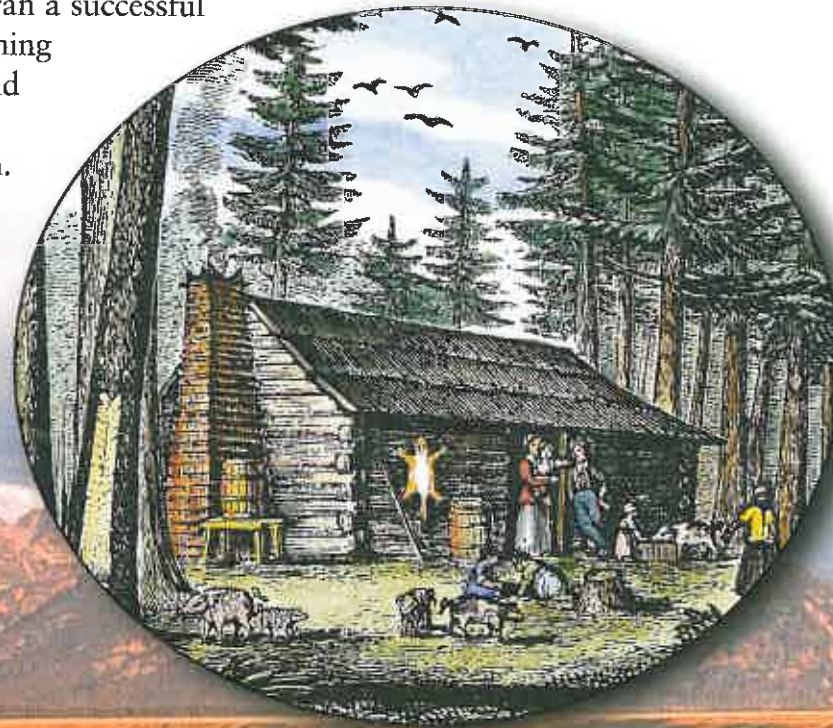
Oregon City, 1850s



The Marshalls signed up for their land. William and Harriet became successful farmers. They learned to love their new home. Harriet wrote and spoke about her experiences as a woman landowner.

Emily never came to Oregon. She married and stayed in the East. Sarah and Emily continued to write to each other. They remained best friends. Sarah became a teacher and later married.

Henry became a captain on a steamship. He loved the rivers but remembered their dangers. Tom never found gold, but he ran a successful hotel for people coming to California. He and Elizabeth married and had six children.



The Rocky Mountains

# GLOSSARY

**cholera** - a disease of the stomach and intestines that causes cramps and vomiting and sometimes death

**emigrant** - a person who leaves his or her own country in order to live in another one

**epidemic** - the rapid spreading of a disease quickly through a community

**expedition** - a long journey for a special purpose, such as exploring

**fertile** - good for growing crops and plants

**landmark** - an object in a landscape that can be seen from far away

**prairie** - a large area of flat or rolling grassland with few or no trees

**rapids** - a place in a river where the water flows very fast

**scavenger** - someone or something that searches among garbage for food or useful things

**territory** - a part of the United States not admitted as a state

**whirlpool** - a current of water that moves quickly in a circle and pulls floating objects toward its center