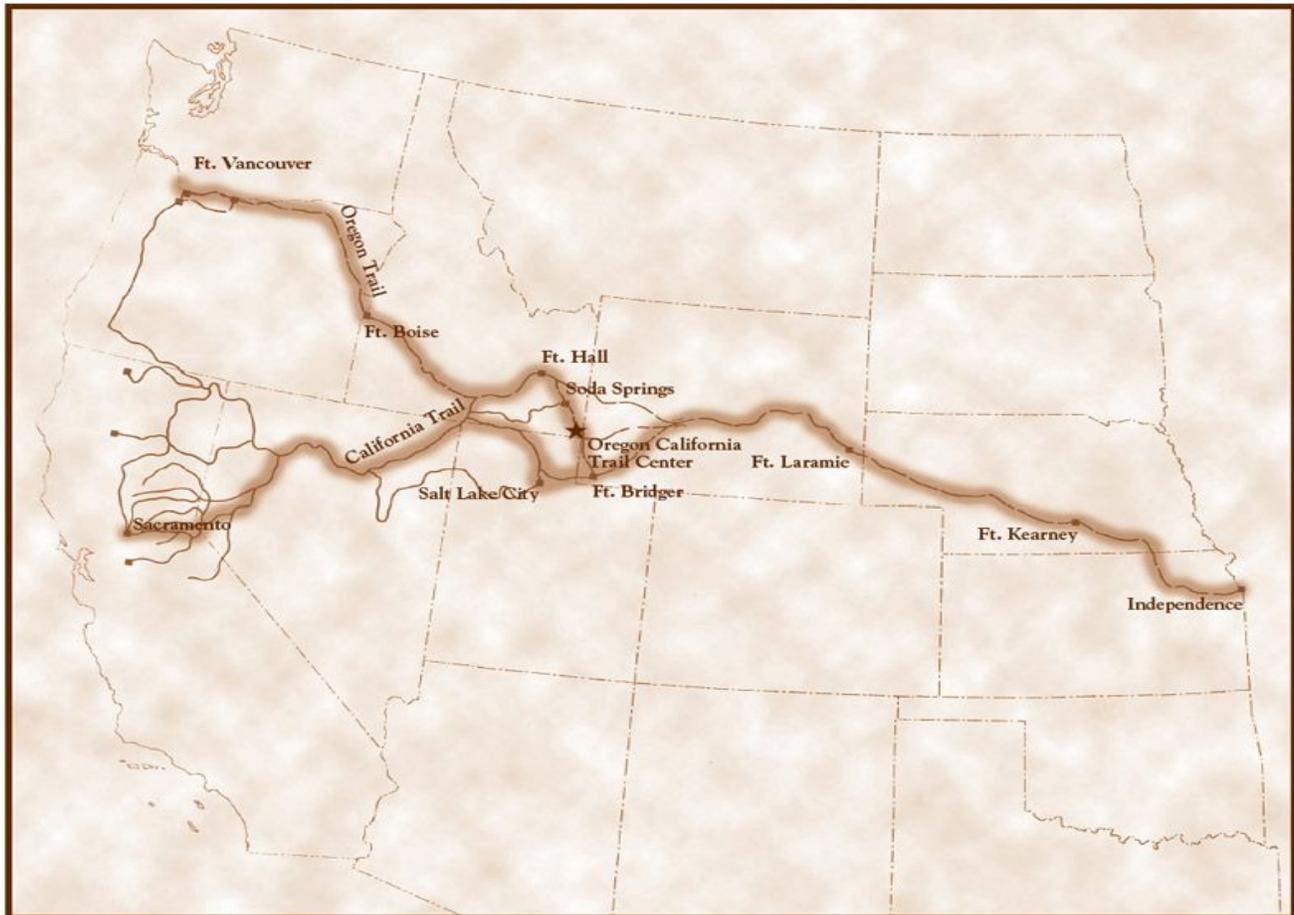


**Chapter Three- RECOLLECTIONS OF A
JOURNEY TO CALIFORNIA IN 1850
BY ISAAC JULIAN HARVEY**



This chapter is an excerpt from the memoirs of I. J. Harvey, writing about his first trip along the Oregon-California Trail. In his story, I.J. refers to the Native American tribes as Indians, the term commonly used in the 1800s. His wording has been kept for historic accuracy.

“ I advertised for 12 mechanics (skilled workers such as carpenters or blacksmiths) to go to California via Oregon and work and give me one-half of the net proceeds for 12 months after our arrival in the country. I soon got my number and I crossed the Missouri River at St. Joseph on the 20th of May 1850. I had two horses at the start for my own use to hunt grass and water ahead of the teams. I had 3 pairs of oxen per wagon. We shipped our wagons and clothing from Indiana to Cincinnati to St. Louis down the Ohio River, and then to Carrollton up the Missouri River.

Going up the Missouri River by riverboat, we were crowded with passengers for California and the boat had many cases of small pox. When we landed at Carrollton, one of my men, John Mills, a big Scotchman, broke out with the disease. I made arrangements to have him be cared for, as it was only

about fifty miles to Utica up Grand River to where we intended to camp for 10 or 20 days. We needed to buy more cattle and visit my father's family.

I bought oxen enough to start with the wagons and our luggage, then told John goodbye. I told him the road and where he could find us when he got well. It was drizzling every day. After we had gone eight to ten miles over rolling prairies some of the boys saw a man pop over a ridge with a blanket over his head. We stopped the teams and rode back to see and, sure enough, there was John Mills in the rain with a fully developed case of smallpox. I asked if he was crazy. He said, "Not much. Made up my mind that I was not going to stay by myself so I just started on the wagon tracks. I thought I could make your camp sometime tonight."

The teams were waiting so John got in a wagon and we drove on until evening and then camped for the night. Next morning we all started in good shape. John Mills was no worse. That evening we stopped near Utica, south of the west branch of Grand Rivers about 50 miles south of my father's home in Grundy County. I stopped for several days to arrange things before I started for Grundy County. I visited my Father, then returned in 10 or 12 days and found Mills sound and well and none of the others affected. I found my folks all well. Brother Evan assisted me in buying stock and I sold 80 acres of land for \$3.50 per acre that I paid \$2.50 per acre in 1839 and took my pay in cattle and top prices.

About the 1st of May, we started for St. Joseph on the Missouri River. We drove very slowly watching for good grass. On the 20th of May, we crossed the Missouri River and started for Oregon and California. Good road and plenty of grass. We soon got out about 200 miles. Every day at noon, we stopped to eat lunch and to attend to our teams. For seven days, we had been meeting teams coming back and reporting that cholera was very bad up the Platte Rivers. One of our wagons had lost its camp kettle and I was waiting for a returning wagon to buy one. While we were eating, one of the men called to me that there were two wagons on the return. I went down to the road ahead of the teams and waited for them to come up.

When the wagons got to me, there was only one driver, a young man not over 20 years old who was driving both teams. He was crying and making such a fuss that I had great difficulty in finding out what was the matter. Finally, I got the teams stopped and him quieted so that I could understand him. He said his uncle in the back wagon was dead and had been since yesterday and his father was in the front wagon and he had nearly died the previous evening. No one would come near him to bury his uncle so he had driven all night. I ordered him to drive out on a nice grassy knoll and unhitch his cattle as they were starved. About crazy, he obeyed me like a child.

I returned to my camp and reported the facts and requested them to follow me down to the wagons and we would dig a grave and bury the dead man. They got shovels as each wagon had a spade or shovel as part of the outfit. I located the grave and they had it about dug. Some of them went after the dead uncle. About this time, the young man started shouting and said his father was dead also so they enlarged the grave and put both men in side by side. I quieted the young man and gave him something to eat and let his team fill up. We helped him hitch up his teams and he started for Missouri greatly improved, but extremely sad.

We returned to our wagons and hitched up. I saddled one of my horses and let the other follow along. I always went ahead in the afternoon to find a good camping place, which required three things- wood, water and grass. Before I left the wagons it was very plain that my crowd all had the blues. Later that day, we met another returning crowd of several wagons who had been as far out as the South Platte. Among them was a man by the name of John Renfro that I had bought land from in 1839. He advised by all means to turn back as everybody was dying of cholera and told me of several of my acquaintances who had died.

My men talked with the crowd with long faces. I was wondering by myself what to do, return back with my business all disarranged and my outfit worthless or keep going. I finally made up my mind to go ahead as far as I could and make the round trip if my health and strength permitted. As soon as my mind was fully settled and determined on going on, my energy and confidence returned to me and I was cheerful and jolly from that afternoon until I finally returned home months later. That evening and night were a gloomy time with my men but I did not let on and was optimistic and determined on my course of action.

Next morning at hitching up time I gave orders as usual. The men drove the cattle and hitched up the teams and then stood in groups of two or three, in close conversation. I let them talk for some time then quietly said, "Boys, you have been consulting among yourselves yesterday afternoon and nearly all night and all this morning. I do not care very much what you have decided and one thing certain, I do not propose to oppose any of you or all if you wish to go back home. You can have one team and plenty of provision to take you. As for the other two wagons and teams, I am going to try to get through with them. If you leave me, I can get two drivers. You know I have two saddle animals and I now can tell you that I have \$500 in gold and I am going through if I can, no turning back with me. If any or all of you wish to continue the trip, I will do all I can to get you through and spend every dollar I have, if necessary. You have all heard what I said. It is now for you to decide for yourselves. Return if you prefer, but after this, not one pound of provision can any of you have to return on and no team while I am alive."

I waited some time, perhaps half an hour. It was Jim Kinsey's day to drive in the lead as the teams took turns in the lead. I said to Jim, "Lead off" as though I knew he would. He slowly went up to his team and started them headed for Oregon and California. I rode along the line and told the boys not to be so slow, as we were already half an hour behind time. They fell in behind Jim Kinsey. I told Jim to move on as everything was ready. Jim started up and everyone followed and by noon all were contented and said they would go through or die in the attempt. From that day on we were known as the jolly crowd.

Life and Death on the South Platte.

There was a team and four very nice young men who followed us up the Platte River. Their captain was very ill with cholera. The boys worked hard all night with him and he pulled through. By the time we got to South Platte, he was riding his horse and bossing his team.

The South Platte is wide and has a very changeable bottom with quicksand. Many teams had great trouble in crossing. I had five pair of cattle to each team and ordered two men on each side of a

team so as to keep them straight and not allow them to stop. If the teams or men fell down into the quicksand, the others kept going and pulled them out. I rode in front and we went across without any



trouble, only the boys were wet up to their waists. One or two fell down and got wet all over – that was only fun for the others.

The Brown team started in after seeing us cross so easily. Unfortunately, he had only one driver wading to keep the team moving. About half-way across, he stepped into a deep place and went all under and some of the team did the same. The wagon stopped and was settling in the quicksand. Captain Brown rode back in a perfect rage. He

ordered all the hands out in the water to help straighten the team. There was a man to each wheel and Captain Brown was off his horse lifting at a wheel himself. I rode back and directed and helped on the off side of the team and we got across to a beautiful meadow. We soon set our tents and sent the stock to graze on the grass, which was in great abundance. As soon as Captain Brown got across, he was taken with a chill. All the hands did everything they could but he had contracted cholera. In two hours he was scarcely nothing but skin and bones, vomiting and purging continuously so long as he had the strength. He lay unconscious until about 2:00 in the night and then quit breathing.

I did not have any hope of his recovery after I looked at him when he was taken down about 10:00 that evening. I strolled out among the emigrants, many sick and some dying. You could hear lamentations of wives and children, some few men sobbing. I am by nature very sympathetic although I had schooled myself for the last month to control myself to help bury the dead and to see men dying nearly every day.

That evening I broke down but was all alone. No one was to be affected by my weakness. About this time, I heard a young girl's voice. She was singing a little childish song. I followed the sound and found a girl cleaning up her few dishes and baking bread for tomorrow and her father lying in the tent recovering from a fever. Her mother was dead and she and her father had started for Oregon with two pair of oxen and a wagon. I found him a very intelligent man and I got over the blues. I returned to camp to see that Captain Brown was past hope and the boys said he was gone. Next morning we buried him. The three remaining boys proposed to me to leave their wagon as it was rather heavy and give me four steers and two yoke of cattle/oxen to haul their grub and luggage to Portland, Oregon. I consented and we all got through.

Riding with Kit Carson



We had traveled several days together with the famous explorer Kit Carson, but he would not travel or camp near the emigrant trains. He said he would prefer fighting Indians than traveling behind emigrant wagons with their goods tied up to the bows loaded, falling down and going off every few days.

One morning just as everyone was finishing breakfast, a young man was sitting on a wagon tongue and had loaded his pistol and capped it. His thumb slipped off the cock and shot him in the breast and he fell over dead. Carson and I were about 20 yards away and we got there just as they were raising him up. His father, mother and several brothers and sisters were around him – the mother weeping over him. We turned away and Carson said, “ I have been telling you all this time that these emigrants not knowing how to use firearms are more dangerous to themselves and everyone around them. “

We all moved on in good health. There was plenty of cholera. In Ah Hollow, we found 28 fresh graves, among them one of my best friends, a tanner in Trenton, Missouri, Scott Noradyke. Everybody was more reconciled to seeing death.

I rode off the road about 300 yards to a wagon and tent and saw before I got to them, two men shooting their pistols at a mark. We saw a fresh grave and another grave dug, all ready for use. I entered into conversation with them and they told me four of them had started for California and pledged themselves to stay together to help each other and bury the dead as long as they could. “The fresh grave there is one of us and the unoccupied grave is for another of us in the tent breathing his last. As soon as he is dead and buried, we intend to move on if the cholera does not catch either of us before we start.”

I asked them how long they had been there and they said four or five days. I rode on and they resumed their shooting. I mention this circumstance to show the kind of men crossing the plains in those early days. As a rule, the cowardly did not start and the sickly dared not. As a body of men, these adventurers have never been surpassed in any way, physically and mentally as times has proved. (Kit Carson had previously visited the Salinas Valley in 1844 with John Fremont. They camped nearby where the First Mayor’s House is located today. We have to wonder whether they discussed California and the Salinas Valley. Perhaps Kit Carson put the idea of living there in I.J. Harvey’s mind.)



Above: Camping along the Sweetwater River

Worst Lost Man in America

We traveled up Wind River by Courthouse Rock, up the Sweetwater River and through the South Pass, I was looking for a narrow gorge of mountains just wide enough for a wagon and team to squeeze through. I thought that would be the Continental Divide.

One afternoon, I left Sweetwater to my left looking for grass for camp. We camped on the river and drove the stock up a mountain for good bunch grass, the best grass for stock I ever saw. I looked south across the Sweetwater, a mile off. When I went to cross the small creek, while my horse was drinking, I saw the water running to my right (toward the west).

For a few seconds I was the worst lost man in America. When did I cross the Sweetwater and get turned around? I know I started on the north side and had been traveling up stream to my left. All of a sudden it occurred to me that I had passed through the South Pass. This water was from the famous Pacific Springs leading to Green River to the west. I was through the South Pass and did not know when I went through. I was now on the Pacific slope.

I went north of Salt Lake City as the Mormons were down on Missourians generally, and Missouri trains got into trouble. If their stock got into gardens or fields, they were fined heavily. It was charged that the Mormons would turn cattle in on purpose to make trouble. I knew many emigrants that were ruined and had to work their way to Oregon or California. I went across Bart River, one of the most beautiful valleys I ever saw. For miles up and down the valley, the waving flax, about three feet high, were in full bloom, a beautiful blue.

Isaac's route to Oregon in 1850.

At Fort Hall on the south bank of the south fork of the Columbia River, called Snake River, the Hudson Bay Company was in control. The store and all the building were surrounded by heavy adobe walls, 10 or 12 feet high, and 6 feet thick. Heavy doors closed the entrance and all the building

inside were forts for defense. They only let in a few of the wild tribes at a time and put a few of the head men and women in the guard house as hostages for the good behavior of the tribe while the trading was going on. They traded with them through a long window, only a limited number allowed inside the corral at a time. Captain Grant, an Englishman, was in command and had been for many years. He had an Indian wife. I sold him some quinine at \$40 per ounce and horseshoe nails at 5 cents per nail. That was all I could spare. I rested one day there even though the Captain wanted me to stay longer.

“Get up, ye beast!”

When we drove down Snake River to where the road divides for California and Oregon, there was real fun! We lost half a day looking at them – two Irishmen with one wagon and a pair of cattle. One wanted to go to Oregon and the other to California. They talked loud and threatened each with their coats off. Finally, one got a hand-saw and proceeded to saw the bed of the wagon in the middle so that each could have a cart.

There were plenty of wagon tongues around as wagons were being abandoned every day. About the time we were ready to continue on, we saw two Scotsmen packing an ox: they did not bother with the wagon. One was holding the ox with a rope on his horns going to lead him. They finally got him packed to their satisfaction – tin cups, coffee pot, and frying pans tied all over him with a sack of flour and bacon in the middle.

I had my boys move my teams quite a distance ahead with two men on each side of the teams with ropes on each leader as they were determined to wait for the show. It was about the best I ever saw. One man was trying to lead the ox, but he would not move, so the other got behind the beast, as he called him, and gave him a big kick and yelling “Get up!”

The beast run his tongue out nearly a foot and bellowed, then away he went. He jerked the fellow down that was holding the rope, made a circuit of about 100 yards, then more bellows and, as he jumped, the tinware rattled. Finally, the pack got under his belly and then the fun trebled. Such bellowing and kicking nearly caused a general stampede. My teams carried my boys 100 or 200 yards with 4 men to a team, but they finally got them under control. That was one of the funniest days of my life. It makes me laugh now as I can see the whole panorama pass before me. My boys were happy for days and would say “Get up, ye beast!” and start laughing again.

Horse trading with the Nez Perce

We moved on nicely for a few days until one of my horses got poisoned and died. The next day, the other one did likewise and that left me on foot. It was against the rules to ride in a wagon unless you were sick. For two or three days, I tried to buy a horse. I had \$500 in gold in my pocket, but no one would listen to me, as they wanted to ride themselves and money was no object to them. This was the second time in my life that money was no account, only an annoyance.

After I walked a few days, I found it no trouble to walk 20 or 25 miles per day, so I walked about 800 miles over the Blue Mountains at the head of the Umatilla River. I bought a horse from the Nez Perce for \$60 – a splendid saddle animal. This valley is the finest in all Oregon.

About three or four days before we got to Grand Rounds on the east side of the Blue Mountains, I dropped one of my wagons as the other two could carry all our luggage and it would save my teams. A wagon cost \$110 in Newcastle, Indiana. The same day, a man from a horse team of 5 men said they were out of meat and had been up and down the road for 10 miles. He said that one of my half dead steers was the fattest animal he could find. He had plenty of money to pay for him and asked the price. I said 25 cents a pound. He said to turn him out. They killed him and gave me \$125, so I was making money as I only paid \$40 for the pair in Missouri.

Oregon

About 150 miles from the Dalles, I was selected, or nearly ordered, to proceed to the Dalles as I had a good horse and plenty of men to look after the wagons. I started for the Dalles and reached there 2-1/2 days later. That put me in the Dalles 3 or 4 days ahead of my teams. I made acquaintance with the officers and they were very obliging. The Commanding Major asked me if I had a man that could run a sawmill. The Government had a sawmill, but they had no one to run it. I said I had just the man. If he would stay there for the winter, the Major said he would pay \$150 per month and board. When John Mills got in, I told him about the opportunity and advised him to stay, which he did. He stopped just 6 months, got his check for \$900 and headed to the mines at Shasta Butte in southern Oregon.

While I was in Dalles, a man brought in a wagon and he wanted to sell it to get money to send his family by water to Portland. I paid him \$100 and shipped it with my other 2 wagons to Portland. The freight for each was \$10. I sold them for \$200 each.

I got acquainted with a Mr. Fischer who was buying stock to winter over there. Just as I was leaving the Dalles, a Mr. Thomas Grubbs, one of my old neighbors, came running after me. He said his wife was sick and he lacked \$10 of being able to pay her passage by boat. I gave him the \$10 and he started away but came back. He said he had left a large red ox at his camp as it couldn't work any more. I could do anything or nothing with it and that he would pay me the \$10 sometime if he was ever able to. My friend, Fischer, was nearby and I told him to go hunt up the steer and we would go halves next spring when he brought his stock down.

He hunted me up and said he had the ox and that it was a perfect mate for his. He thought he could sell the pair for \$300 and said he was ready to pay me \$75 for my half. I sold, got the money but never saw my friend Grubbs, after that day. I learned of his death on the Umpqua River several years later.

Mr. and Mrs. Silver

We crossed the Columbia River at the Dalles and hired Indians with canoes to bring our horses behind the canoes and one lead ox and 7 extra canoes to bring the stock. I had two steers about the middle of the river, turn over on their sides and quit trying to swim. They floated with the current down the river and out of sight. All the others got over nicely. We drove down the trail 8 or 10 miles to our

camp. There was a Mr. and Mrs. Silver who had been traveling with us for several days. Our camps were near together. Mr. Silver and I were helping drive the stock up the mountain 300 or 400 yards in plain view of the camp. We heard a fearful scream from Mrs. Silver and as we looked, saw her clothing blaze up nearly to her head. The next instant she fell full length and rolled over and over, faster and faster for about 20 yards. Then, she got up and looked for us. She had on woolen underclothes and was not burned at all. She was a very good woman and always cheerful. He became one of the big merchants of Portland.

Saving Pompey

Next day when we got to the top of Cape Horn Mountain, we could look over the whole valley and down on the Columbia River. We could see an Indian Village. I saw something very white. One of our oxen who had drifted away was called Pompey. Pompey was a large, nearly white all over animal, so we set out for the village. When we arrived, there was Mr. Pompey, nicely staked out. The Indians said it could cost us \$2 for getting him out of the river. "Where's the other steer?" I asked. "Me shoot him." The poor animal had been mired in mud up to his knees. They cut him off at the knees and there we could see all four legs sticking out of the mud. They had skinned him and were feasting on the meat. I paid \$2 and got Pompey back. I later sold him and his mate for \$250.

While the Indians and my boys were crossing the stock at old Fort Vancouver, I was talking with the lady of the house and she informed that she had seen the Columbia River frozen over where we were then crossing. Men and horses crossed for over two months. I then and there made up my mind that I would cross my stock immediately, which I did. This was about the 28th of September, 1850.

Portland

Thursday, we got to Portland, 18 miles from Ft. Vancouver by way of the trail and ranched my stock about 1 mile below town. We set up our tents just on the north edge of Portland. Friday, we overhauled our baggage. By Saturday noon, we were neatly shaved and put on our Sunday best. We nearly all were in the habit, in my company, of wearing good clothes. I had one saddler, three blacksmiths, four sawmill men and four other good working young men. Well, on Saturday afternoon, we started to see the town, each one looking out for himself. I inquire for the largest store in town and was directed to Mr. Stephen Coffins, as he owned 1/3 interest in the townsite and two large steam sawmills besides his store. I found the store and went in and got a position where I could see everything.

I noticed the bookkeeper eyeing me very closely and made up my mind to let him look as much as he pleased as I had not run away from home and furthermore did not think there was anyone in Portland that ever knew me. After a while, he laid down his pen and started around my way. When he got near me, he said, "Aren't you Isaac J. Harvey of Newcastle, Indiana?" "Yes, sir," I told him. "Don't you know me? I am Burnell, bookkeeper for Carlisle, White & Company of Cincinnati, where you and the Murphys bought goods", he continued. Then I knew him. He had left for California in the

spring of 1849 and I passed through Cincinnati one year later. Of course, we had a talk and he invited me to call that evening, which I did.

He told me his boss had asked him to look out for a salesman as everyone in the store was inexperienced. "If you will come around tomorrow about 10:00, I will take you up and introduce you to Mr. Coffin and recommend you." I was on time next morning and we went to Mr. Coffin's private residence, a very ordinary half-finished dwelling. We took our seats in a very small sitting room and when he came in, we both arose for the introduction.

Mr. Coffin made no stop, but rushed by Mr. Burnell, holding out his hand and said, "Ike, is this you? When did you leave Newcastle and how is everybody about Cambridge City?"

Mr. Burnell said he would go back to the store as he was not needed. Mr. Coffin had left for Oregon in 1845 with Gen. Palimer. He ran a line of canal boats from Cincinnati to Cambridge City for many years and we all did our shipping through his company, Cambridge City being the nearest point. The Harveys, Julians and Coffins were old acquaintances in old North Carolina. I spent most of the day with him, answering questions. The result of the conversation was for me to go to the store early Monday morning and take charge and run it as I would my own. "You know I don't know anything about storekeeping," he said. "I can run canal boats and sawmills first class. You will board at Mrs. Emerson's Boarding House as she is building and buying goods and lumber."

I ran the store all winter with his help. I had three or four of my boys in and around the mills at \$6 per day, but that did not satisfy them. They held a council and reported they concluded to each pay me \$450 and they would go to the mines and take their chances. I told them I thought they had better stay where they were, but no, they wanted me to help them outfit for the mines and for me to come in June to get the balance due me. This was about the first of March. I sent them off in good shape and happy."

In the spring, I.J. would go on to California. After deciding where he wanted to establish his family, he started the long trip back to Illinois using the sea route from San Francisco to New York. The last part of the trip was by train from New York to Illinois. In all, I. J. was gone for 19 months.

In 1852, he made the trip to California by wagon train again, this time, taking his wife and four children with him.