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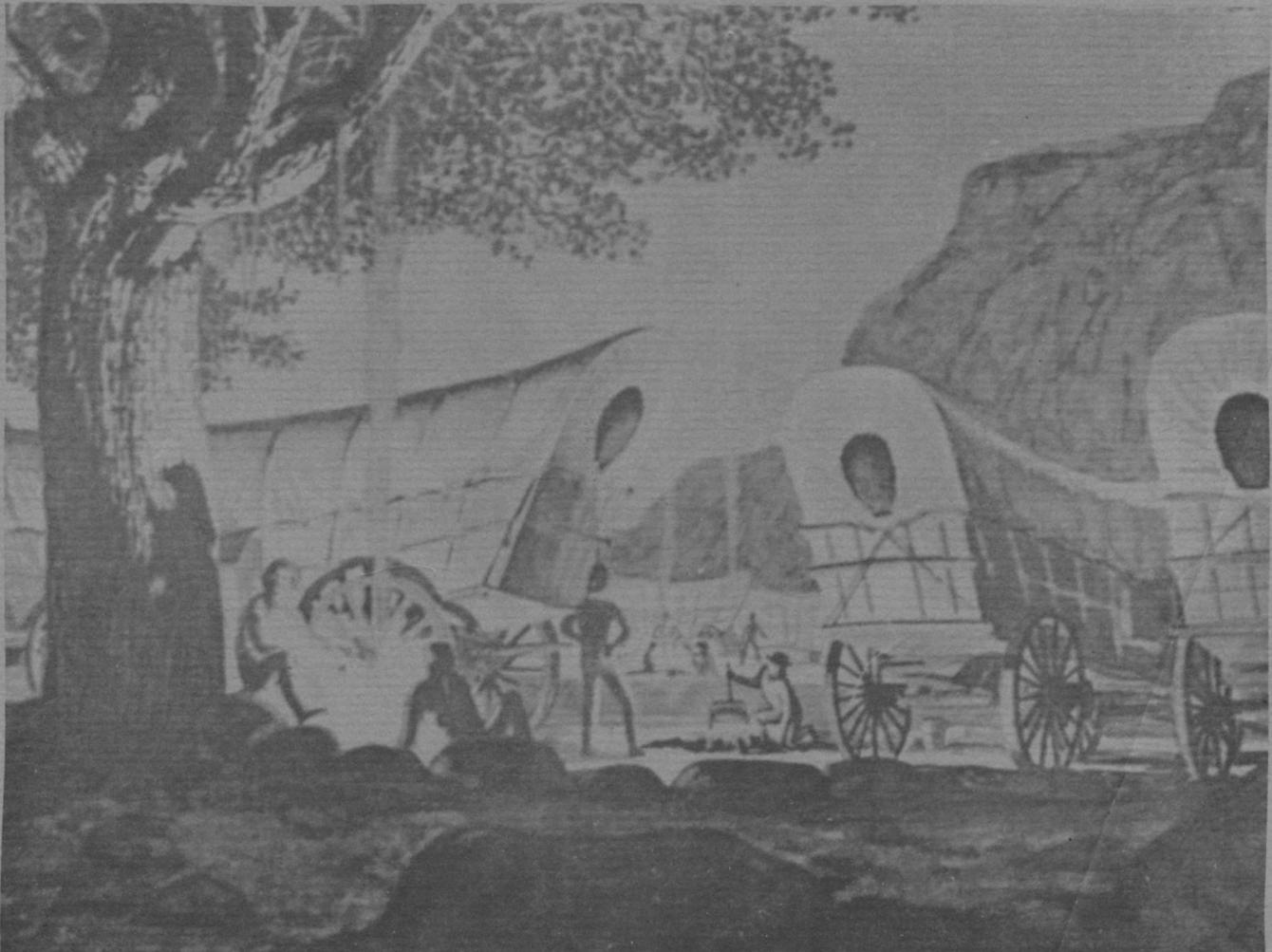
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NEWS BULLETIN

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by

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The following account is not Sutter County History, as such, however, it may be of interest as an account of crossing the plains in 1849.

This was dictated by the author, Felix Grundy Coats, in 1915 at the age of 86½ years. He made the trip with his father, Wilson Coats. Wilson Coats returned to Missouri in 1851 and returned to California with other members of the family, including his son Milam Bethel Coats. Milam Bethel Coats was the father of Trusten Polk Coats, an early resident of Yuba City. Trusten Polk Coats was married to Laura Jane Kirk, and their children were Milam Grover Coats and Judge Arthur N. Coats, both deceased, and Mary Coats Kelly of Sacramento, Trusten Polk Coats of Oakdale, and Ruth Coats Metcalf of Wheatland.



ON THE GOLDEN TRAIL

By Felix G. Coats

Hearing so many tales of the rich gold mines in California, which caused such wild excitement over the whole country, my Father and I having caught the "Gold Fever," were anxious to try our luck.

So, after due preparation, we bade farewell to my mother, brothers and sisters in Henry County, Missouri, near Clinton, on May First, 1849. I was then twenty years old.

We were to meet my two cousins at Independence, Missouri, as they too had the gold fever, and decided to join us.

We traveled about fifteen miles the first day of our adventurous journey and that night camped in a little creek bed. During the night we encountered a wild thunder storm and it rained torrents, not gold, as yet, however. The creek rose until the water was waist deep and I had to hitch the oxen and pull the wagon on to high ground.

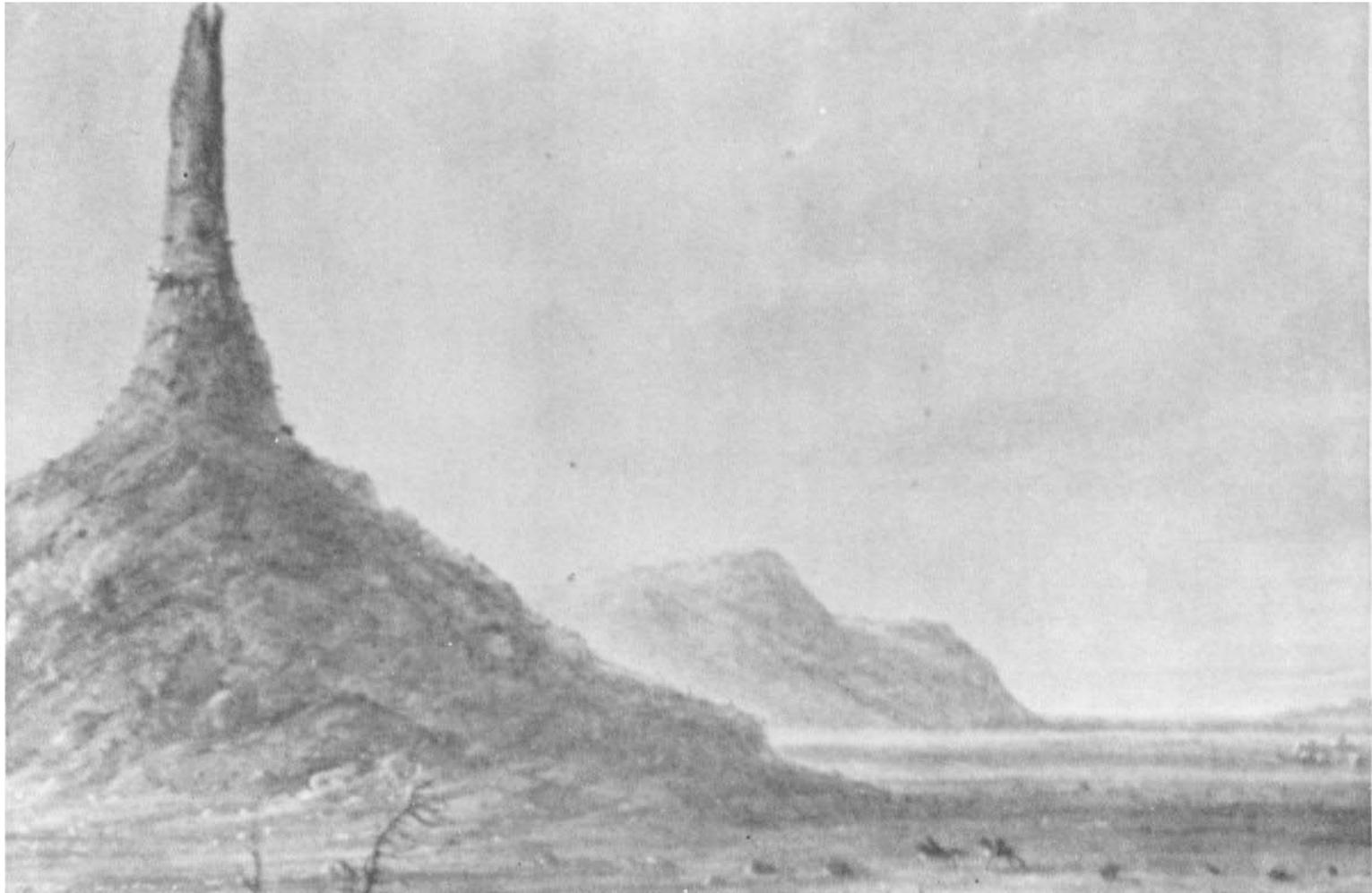
Nothing of consequence occurred the second day out. It took us about three days to reach Independence, and my cousins met us there. Here we completed our outfit and started out again, having three yoke of oxen and one wagon. We left Independence May 4th and as we continued on our journey we saw many people going in the same direction.

The road led through that part of Indian territory now known as Kansas, after a few days we came to the "Kaw" of Kansas River, where there was a ferry to take the wagons across, but the oxen had to swim over. The stream was at its highest and it was running so swiftly that we had trouble getting the Oxen across. I had a thrilling ride on one of the swimming mules, and was fairly chilled to the bone in the icy waters by the time we reached the opposite bank. The comfortable blaze I succeeded in kindling was, believe me, duly appreciated.

While on the road to the Platte River the wind blew from the north for several days and it was so cold that our overcoats felt very comfortable, even while walking, but after reaching the Platte River the weather grew warmer. We traveled along this river about three weeks and on the second day along its course we encountered the roughest hailstorm I ever braved. Fortunately we tied our oxen securely to our wagons, for a train of oxen near ours became frightened and stampeded. It was several days before they were found.

About this time we fell in with a party consisting of ten people and two wagons. Our new acquaintances were the Tisons and Armstrongs and they traveled the rest of the way with us.

(The identity of the two cousins mentioned has never been established, in spite of much diligent research, but Missouri was generously populated with Coats cousins at that time.)



Next we sighted Chimney Rock which was about eighty feet high and so named for its likeness to a chimney. It seemed to be only a distance of eight or ten miles from us, but we were two weeks in reaching it. In the far distance we saw what we thought were beautiful silver colored clouds which proved to be snow on the Rocky Mountains.

All this time we were traveling we did not see a solitary house. We saw only a great many Sioux Indians but they were all very peaceful and we had no trouble whatever with them. Herds of Buffalo roamed over these plains and we succeeded in killing one fine fellow. The meat of which was extremely tempting. Antelope, as well as the buffalo, abounded and when herds of both these animals would run, it seemed as though they shook the earth.

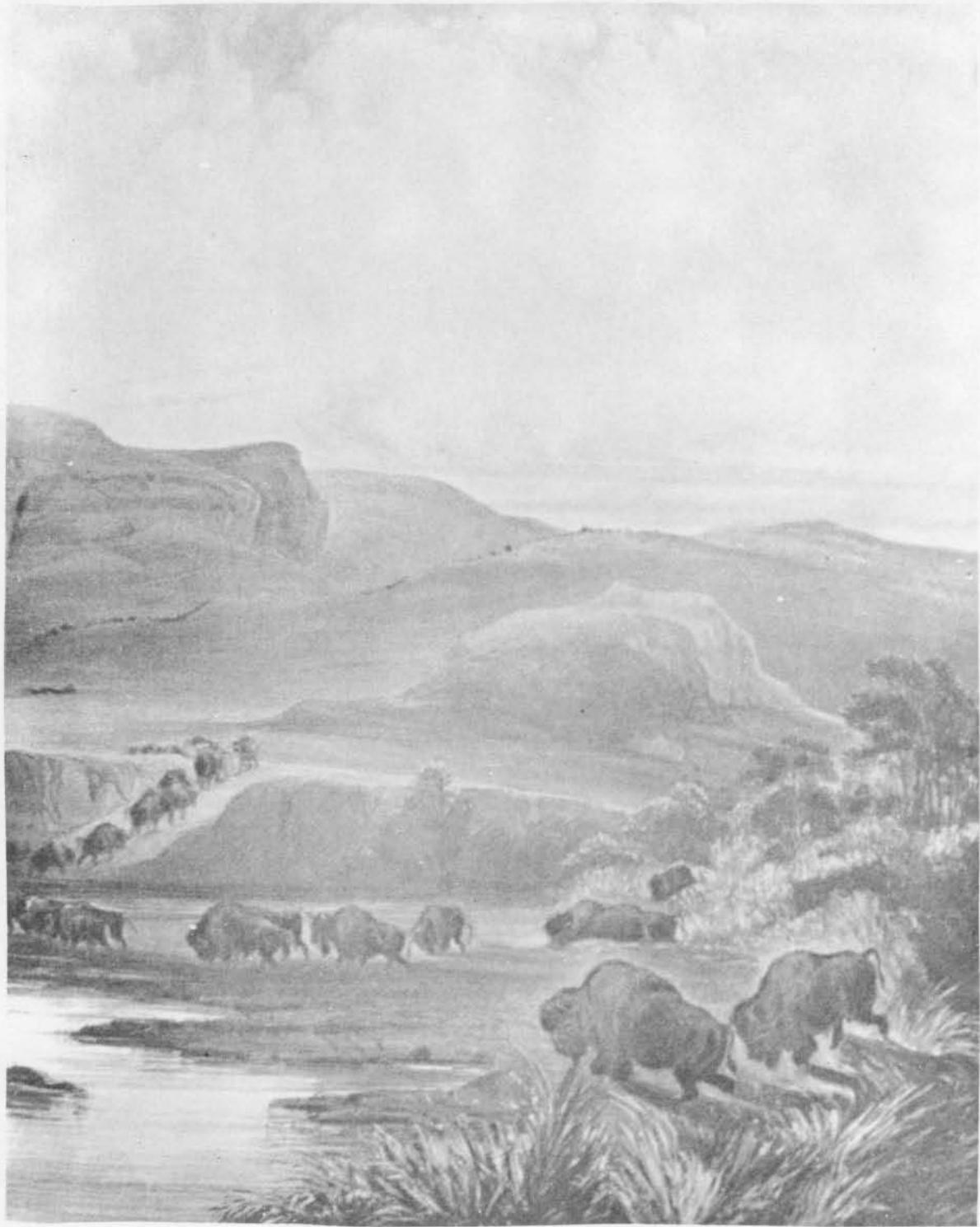
On arriving at the South Platte we found that the river was two feet deep, two miles wide and very sandy, so that we had to keep the oxen moving to prevent our wagons from sinking. We camped on the bank of this river which also served as a campground for five hundred Sioux Indian warriors. They were not hostile, however, the chief put out a guard that night so that the Indians would not bother us. A great many of them traveled along with us on the same road. Of course, the bucks rode on horses, while the squaws walked, the latter did all the work too. They put up the tents and took them down while the bucks were men of leisure. The squaws had a pole strapped on each side of their ponies extending to and dragging on the ground, upon which were the hides to carry their immense tents made of buffalo robes. In like manner the dogs carried the papooses.

One frosty morning we arrived at the Laramie River in the south-eastern part of Wyoming. It was a very swift stream and we had to raise our wagon beds about a foot to keep the water from running into them. We had to wade the river to keep the oxen from swimming down the stream. We then went on to Fort Laramie and it was here that we saw the first house after leaving Missouri.

As we passed through the Black Hills there was a great deal of gravel which was extremely hard on the oxens feet. At this place everyone lightened their loads. Provisions were thrown away such as beans, flour, bacon and almost all eatables except sugar. All heavy things were discarded such as cooking utensils and wagons. Sometimes a piece was cut off a wagon tongue to lighten the load.

Upon arriving at the North Platte we found that the river was high and it was necessary to construct a raft by tying logs together with ropes to take the wagons across. It took some time as the wagons had to be taken apart in order to get them on the raft. The oxen had to swim the stream. Several men of another party were drowned here.

We were now passing through an alkali country which worked a great hardship on the oxen as the water was not fit to drink. As a substitute we put a slice of bacon down their throats. Then we proceeded up the Sweetwater



and came to Independence Rock, so called because the first emigrants who passed through arrived there July 4th. We had now been on our way nearly two months. On July 4th we arrived at the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, but we lacked fireworks to celebrate the occasion. We found a flat near South Pass where we dug under the turf about a foot and found ice which was clear as crystal.

Next we arrived at "Big Sandy" where the road forked. We took the road to Fort Hall, the other fork led to Salt Lake. On the road to Fort Hall a man by the name of Kincaid was taken ill and I drove his team for him until he was well and then he went on to Oregon. This was the latter part of July.

We now came to a desert which was forty miles across and although there was no water on it, it did not work any hardship on us. After that we came to Green River, a rapid stream, where we took our wagons across on a ferry boat. While traveling Bear River, the most crooked river I have ever seen, we passed "Soda Springs" and "Steamboat Springs," which boiled like geysers.

At Bear River a train headed by Captain Hedgespeth was going to make a short cut through a narrow path. On inquiring of an Indian if he thought they could get through, we received this reply, "I think the Geeshaws, (meaning the oxen), can make it, but do not think the "God-Damn Yous" (meaning the wagons,) can."

A few days after this my cousins became dissatisfied, so we decided to separate. They went on (to Oregon) and we joined forces with the Armstrongs by doubling up our oxen with theirs and leaving our wagon behind.

On reaching Fort Hall we traveled down the Snake River and passed Salmon Falls. Just before reaching Raft River, one hot night the mosquitoes made it very uncomfortable for the animals and ourselves. We built a fire and tried to smoke them out, but our efforts proved to be of no avail.

Traveling down Goose Creek and finally turning south at the Thousand Springs Valley, we arrived at the Humboldt River. We followed this river to its sink, a distance of three hundred miles. This was an alkali country and very severe on us, causing our faces and hands to crack open. There being no grass we cut down willows for the oxen to eat.

Proceeding westward forty miles across the Nevada Desert, after two days traveling, both day and night, we arrived at Truckee, August 20th. There was no water on the desert, except a hot spring that would boil a ham in half an hour. It was impregnated with some kind of mineral which made it unfit to drink. It boiled up every few minutes like a geyser and flowed away in a big stream. One of our men went on ahead to dam up the water from this spring so it would cool for the oxen to drink but another party arrived just ahead of ours and let their oxen drink most of the water. Several of our yoke gave out on the desert, but after they were rested they followed us in to Truckee.

The snow on the beautiful Sierras was a welcome sight to us after traveling over the hot and sandy desert. One of the first objects that attracted our attention on approaching the Truckee River was a large shade tree. The water from a pure cold mountain stream made a delicious drink. On all this long journey from Missouri to California there were but two ferries on which we were able to cross rivers.

We traveled up the Truckee River, crossing it twenty-seven times in thirty miles, having great difficulty on account of its swift current and huge boulders. We finally came to Donner Lake where the Donner Party perished three years before. We saw stumps of trees that had been cut off twenty-five feet above ground, showing the depth of snow and no one can imagine the privations they had gone through.

Our next problem was climbing the rugged summit of the Sierras which rose before us. After much labor we took our wagons as far as possible then unhitched all except one yoke of oxen and took them to the top of the mountain and fastened chains fifty feet long to the tongue and pulled the wagons up one at a time. The grade going down on the other side was so steep that some dragged limbs of trees behind their wagons to act as a "break," but we chained all of the oxen, except one yoke to the rear of the wagon, with a man to each yoke with club in hand, who would go down shouting "whoa!", from top to bottom.

Our first sight of a gold mine was at Steep Hollow. Also the first saloon of California was located at this place. Whiskey was sold at fifty cents a drink.

About September 5th we went to Grass Valley where the grass was waist high, from which the place derives its name. This is now one of the largest mining districts of California. At that time we never thought of finding gold there, thus we overlooked a great opportunity.

I was without funds and anxious to get work, so I went five or six miles to a mining camp at Bear River where I worked a week for which I was paid five dollars a day. When I came back to where our party camped, they were gone. Then I went to work driving a team to Sacramento for an emigrant and his family. I went from there to Hangtown, now Placerville, which was a typical mining-camp. Almost every tent was a gambling place and at that time there were very few women in this section of the country. In those days it cost forty cents to send a letter east.

The Tysons had preceded me to Hangtown and as I was not feeling well, I stopped with them a couple of weeks until I was better. There was a big tent close by where men used to gamble. One night Mrs. Tyson made pies, which I sold to them for a dollar a piece.

My next occupation was driving a team for a man by the name of Rare. It took me five days to go the forty-five miles to Sacramento. I made several trips for him

between Sacramento and Coloma to haul goods.

In February 1850, two young fellows and myself went to Sacramento and bought ten mules and started a pack train. We packed provisions a long way into the mountains to Stoney Bar and made many trips. We discontinued the pack train in April because the young fellow we left to sell our goods gambled all of our money away. So we sold out our mules and went to mining, but made no big strikes.

In January 1851, my father went back east and my brother, Bill, who had crossed by the southern route, and I mined up on the North Fork of the American River. During the fall of 1851 we went to Diamond Springs, three miles from Placerville, and spent the winter. My Father returned, bringing the rest of the family with him from Missouri and we all went to Santa Clara, but only stayed a couple of weeks because all of that country was covered by Spanish Land Grants and we could not get any land.

After leaving Santa Clara Valley, we journeyed to Contra Costa County and camped near where the town of Danville is now located on what is now known as the Cook Ranch. We moved to Tassajara in the fall of 1852 and took up a homestead of 160 acres and bought the rest of the land gradually.

There were no houses between our place and Livermore and but one at Livermore. There were no roads and no bridges and we had to ford all the creeks. The nearest Post Office was at Alamo, ten miles distant.

I found mining very interesting, so I returned to the mines in 1852 and stayed until the spring of 1853, returning again to Tassajara in April of that year in time to help Father harvest his crop which we cut with a scythe and cradle, and thrashed it with a two-horsepower machine owned by Bill and Gillett. I drove a yoke of oxen to Martinez to get the scythe and cradle and as they did not have any there I had to cross over to Benicia.

The house we built was made of split lumber, there being no sawed lumber in it except the floor. We went down to Moraga Valley and got the Redwoods and split the lumber ourselves. The house which my Father built in 1856 still stands. (note: the house was destroyed by fire about 1917.)

I was married to Leona Doggett in 1860 at Tassajara. She came down from Oregon with her people in 1859 and lived about a mile from us. My wife crossed the plains to Oregon in 1853 at the age of eleven and rode horseback most of the way.

Dictated: 1915 at the age of 86 ½ years.

Felix Grundy Coats was born in Callaway County, Missouri, August 9, 1828. He was a son of Wilson Coats born in Tennessee August 10, 1802, and died in Selma, California January 3, 1886. His Mother was Mary Phillips, born in

Tennessee January 31, 1805, died in Tassajara, November 27, 1875. She was the daughter of John Phillips and Nancy Allen. Wilson Coats was the son of Reverend William Coats who was born in South Carolina about 1765 and died in Callaway County, Missouri, June 13, 1836. His wife was Nancy Baker, daughter of John Baker of Tennessee. She was born, date unknown, and died in July of 1849 in Callaway County, Missouri.