

## James Griffing to William Smyth

James Sayre Griffing wrote from Topeka, Kansas Territory, to William Smyth, editor of the Owego (New York) Times. Griffing described in some detail his family's overland journey to Kansas Territory in a "double waggon." He commented upon the quantity and nature of provisions to take on an overland journey, methods for crossing streams and rivers, and the advantages of a good "fowling piece" for hunting wild game. Griffing also observed that the amount of travel in and through Kansas Territory had increased during 1859, due in part to the Pike's Peak gold rush. Griffing also mentions interactions with Native Americans in the area.

Creator: Griffing, James S. (James Sayre), 1822-1882

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Topeka July 27<sup>th</sup> 1859

Mr Editor

In the latter part of October 1854.  
after a long journey overland from Indianapolis  
we reached the western borders of civilization  
and pushed out into these, then wilds, just open for  
settlement, to identify ourselves with the sovereign squatters  
determined to use whatever humble influence we might  
to orpel a threatening curse, and help to plant its institutions  
upon such a basis as would be most in accordance with the  
rights of man, and would not prove a stigma to all the  
teachings of our earlier years. With your written history  
you are familiar. Yet after all that had said of Kansas  
wrong & abuses, the whole of her injuries, never have been, never  
can be fully told. But <sup>to speak of Kansas wrongs</sup> this was no object in view.  
I <sup>presume</sup> ~~can~~ save yourself, & perhaps not many of your readers  
ever made such a trip overland in a double wagon,  
and as the present developments of our country  
may number some <sup>of them</sup> among the multitude flocking  
to the New Eldorado. It may be that a little experience  
in travelling & camping out may not prove valueless.  
In the spring summer & early fall it is a very pleasant  
way to travel in a prairie country, especially beyond the  
railroads. It was our good fortune to make the trip  
with a family who had journeyed much in this manner,  
feeling as much at home, miles away from all human  
being, seated in their own family wagon, as others around  
their own cottage hearth. - They travelled with two wagons  
one to carry the family, the other household goods. Suitable water  
proof cloth coverings were drawn over each wagon





A span of stout horses was attached to each, and an extra hitched behind ready for any emergency always handy to ride to a distant house to inquire the way, buy feed, ride ahead to look out a good camping place, and all the numberless errands which such a journey requires. - No person is fully equipped without providing themselves with a water proof balloon - shaped cloth tent which can be pitched in about five minutes, after digging a small circular ditch around when the outer edge will come to prevent an incursion of water. During some of these very sudden inundating showers we have. In spring & fall the usual camping place is in the timber along some stream, but in midsummer the highest points of prairie are sought to avoid the multiplicity of punkies & Mosquitoes. None the ever moving winds give no rest to the soles of their feet. Circumstances must govern about the amount of provisions carried. It is likely to be procured <sup>along the way</sup> ahead, better not have them. If not, better take them. Provisions for a long journey with all necessary cooking utensils can be carried easily. The luxuriant growth of fine grass will furnish a bountiful feed for your beasts, which can always be kept at hand with a tether. The streams are generally but a few miles apart, and when there is uncertainty ahead about securing wood ~~ahead~~ for camping purposes, be sure and get a supply sometime during the day for your supper and night fire. Then you are at home wherever night may overtake you. In crossing prairies it is generally best to keep the well beaten tracks, for these stones & brush are thrown in to prevent mixing. At other points your team or wagon may sink so deep that extractions may seem next

## James Griffing to William Smyth

As impossible. and then its very sticking to ones  
 nature to wade into some bottomless mirehole to  
 lift for hours at a time on some punken waggon.  
 I will remember an illustration of this fact. in our attempt  
 to ~~transfer~~ the old Indian ferry at the mouth <sup>of the</sup> Kansas. The family  
 waggon was landed safely on the opposite shore the horses were  
 brought back to help the heavier waggon up the bank. We had  
 just gone down <sup>into the boat</sup> the steep bank with the heavy waggon  
 and four horses and were all crowded safely into the  
 boat when water was fast seen rushing over the  
 end board under the false bottom. there was no  
 chance to retreat and in a very few moments must  
 sink. Our propelling power was an old rope attached  
 to trees on each bank which was seized by the  
 Indians and the boat moved by pulling hand over  
 hand. No sooner was our danger ~~made known~~ <sup>perceived</sup>  
 than the cry arose all hands to the rope, which was  
 quickly seized and the old scow went plowing the waters  
 with great rapidity. When we had reached about the center  
 of the stream the false bottom commenced flipping  
 about the horses legs. so that we were obliged to drop the  
 rope to liberate the horses from the waggon. this left us at  
 the mercy of the current. but the momentum already  
 given caused one corner of the boat to touch the shore  
 about 15 rods below the ferry before she went down. The  
 horses had already pitched ~~out~~ <sup>off</sup> of the boat and were  
 floundering in the bottomless sediment abounding at  
 the mouth of this river. and could not possibly reach terra  
 firma. From ten o'clock until sundown. it took our company  
 aided by about twenty Indians to extricate ourselves



and on such an appearance, as we made.  
 As sneered, and belauded with the most  
 slimiest, greasiest mud, such as was mud, that  
 sticketh closer than a brother. Such happenings  
 are not uncommon travelling upon the frontiers.  
 But the roads generally are hard and smooth  
 and generally follow the divides. Yet it is wise to  
 heed this advice - "Look well to the crossings."  
 A good fowling piece skillfully used will often  
 furnish a plenty & variety of meat and many of the  
 streams abound in fish. Its best to follow the  
 old road, and avoid all cut-offs to save distance.  
 In this way <sup>many</sup> families can travel about as cheap as  
 they can stay at home, and <sup>have</sup> with a little anxiety in  
 starting of a journey of <sup>hundreds</sup> miles, and others would  
 to go and visit a neighbor. The present year has far  
 surpassed any former in the vast amount of travel  
 through & in this territory. Some days the road would be  
 lined from morning until night, bound either for  
 Pike's Peak, California, or Oregon, and not a few to  
 settle in the territory. A great share of the Pike's Peak  
 immigration returned before getting there, especially those  
 not "counting the cost" before starting. Reliable reports are  
 beginning to come in but none very flattering as yet. A  
 young lady of this neighborhood writing to her father, says she  
 has seen but three white women since she left the settlements  
 that her husband has started a bakery in Denver city, that  
 about 800 Indians are camped within a few rods of the house  
 that more than half a dozen <sup>squads</sup> are looking over her shoulder  
 whilst writing, that in a few days some are taking out at the  
 rate of a hundred dollars a day, and that hundreds were waiting  
 for their board, that much was being done by way of prospecting  
 and this still lived in hope. My shut is full of news.