

The Chroniclers

Our Riggs, Kimsey, and Smith ancestors kept no diaries or chronicles of their travels on the Oregon Trail and its three new extensions in the years 1845 and 1846. But this author was fortunate in having been able to rely heavily on relatively inaccessible journals of those who traveled alongside our ancestors over each of these three new routes.

Chroniclers **John R. McBride** and **J. Quinn Thornton** both mention their having traveled with our Smith ancestors on the 1846 Barlow Road and on the 1846 Southern Route, respectively. Both also commented specifically that their own extensive accounts could easily have pertained to the experiences of any emigrants traveling alongside them.

Diarist **James Field**, age twenty-two, actually drove one of our Riggs ancestors' wagons in 1845, so his detailed daily observations serve as a first-hand record of this family's experience. Nine-year-old **Angeline Smith** was a member of the Smith party on the 1846 Southern Route. Her brief recollections add poignant details of these families' experience.

This story could not have been told completely were it not for the newly rediscovered remembrances of **Levi Scott**. Although my ancestors did not travel alongside him, Scott played a key role in both the discovery of the 1846 Southern Route, and of leading our ancestors' traveling companions over this new route. My having had unrestricted access to these observations was invaluable in understanding the South Road, as was working with the team of trail historians who have been editing Scott's journal for publication.

Finally, there were also numerous other first-hand accounts from a wide variety of sources, who mentioned our ancestors either directly by name or by association. Especially valuable among these were the journals of emigrant Virgil Pringle and rescuer Thomas Holt, both of which are reprinted by Dale Morgan. All of these sources helped in weaving together the story of what our ancestors and their traveling companions went through, in opening these three new wagon routes in their inaugural year. I am indebted to each of them (see Bibliography).

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Historian Dale Morgan in his classic *Overland in 1846*, devoted nearly a dozen pages to excerpts from what he called **John R. McBride's** "relatively inaccessible" account of the "front-running" emigration to Oregon -- those "advance companies which in 1846 departed from St. Joe [which include our Absalom Smith ancestors] No diary by a member of this portion of the Oregon emigration has yet come to light ... but in the library of the Oregon Historical Society are some reminiscences by John R. McBride which greatly enlarge our understanding of the 1846 emigration." McBride turned fourteen when he migrated in 1846, and the exact date of its composition is unknown, but

Morgan puts it after completion of the Pacific Railroad in 1983. McBride, born August 22, 1832, died on July 20, 1904, at age 71. His account was serialized in Salem, Oregon's *Capital Journal* (now *Statesman-Journal*), from February 4 to March 23, 1926 (see Morgan pp 90-100).

J. Quinn Thornton, thirty-six, told of emigrants accompanying him in the companies out of Independence, Missouri, who rode near the rear of the 1846 migration. These included the Donner party, and the large party of our James Smith ancestors. Thornton also provided vivid details of the emigrants who traveled over the new Southern Route. In 1848, Thornton visited California, where he interviewed members of his former Donner Party traveling companions who had survived that terrible the winter of 1846-1847 trapped in the high-Sierras. His book, which was published in 1849 in New York by Harper and Brothers, is now fairly rare, but is in circulation at some Oregon libraries.

As one of the major chroniclers of the 1845 wagon train and the Meek Cut-off, **James Field's** daily diary provides what is probably the most comprehensive and informative day-to-day chronicle of this journey. The Field diary was serialized in the weekly *Willamette Farmer* newspaper, Portland, Oregon, on most Fridays from April 18 through August 1, 1879. Twice Field left his valuable journal with our Riggs ancestors in Polk County when he returned home to New York, but eventually donated it to the Oregon Society of Pioneers. It was transcribed by the author from microfiche at the University of Oregon Library in Eugene.

The recollections of **Ageline Smith** (Crews), daughter of James Smith party leader William Smith, were probably written much later her in life, drawing from her at times somewhat confusing but always poignant memory. Her account provides the only partial record of what happened to the Smith party in December, 1846. This brief but important record is available from the Oregon Historical Society, Manuscript 1188.

Levi Scott's yet unpublished remembrances were recorded under Scott's guidance in the late 1880s when Scott was over ninety. The book was written in collaboration with Judge James Layton Collins, who was only thirteen years old when he immigrated with his family over a new "southern route" into Oregon in 1846, for which Scott acted as guide, at age forty-nine. Scott adds the dimension of having participated in the first failed attempt to locate the route, in which the Applegate brothers did not participate. Scott's account also expands our understanding of the perilous nature of the second barely-successful attempt at locating this illusive new Southern Route, which was led by Jesse Applegate. In addition, Scott provides a first-hand account of having actually led the emigrants over the entire route, in both 1846 and 1847. Thus Scott was the only person who played a pivotal role in all phases of the early Southern Route, from its first inception, through its discovery, and on to its eventual development as a major artery into Oregon. Never published, this important journal had been taken by Collins descendants when they moved to Alaska, from where it was recently recovered.