

A STORY OF THE "EARLY DAYS"

Written by a Native Missourian

One Who Helped To

"WIN THE WEST."

In Commemoration

- of -

THE ONE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

- OF -

MISSOURI STATEHOOD.



Henry H. Avis (1840-1927) ca. 1917.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF FREIGHTING ACROSS THE PLAINS,
THE PONY EXPRESS, GOLD MINING AND INDIAN FIGHTING.¹

BY HENRY AVIS²

(Known as Hank Avis)

Born September 11, 1840, at St. Louis, Missouri.

Living in 1921 at 1220 Prospect Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

“A REAL MISSOURIAN”

In 1857 being seventeen years old I, like all boys, longed to make a trip across the plains to see the vast herds of buffalo and antelope that I had heard so much about. Living in Kansas City and talking every day with old mountain men who told me such wonderful tales of the Indians and Buffalo it excited my young heart so much that I determined I must go if I had to drive a team. The Mormon war was going on and the government was sending hundreds of men and wagons from Ft. Leavenworth to Salt Lake City to help fight the Mormons, so I packed my carpet sack and off I started to drive a team of six mules to Salt Lake.

The government bought up all the mules in the whole country; it had thousands of them and most of them were unbroken and had to be partly broken before starting on the trip to Salt Lake. So every wagon-master had to spend about ten days breaking his mules before loading his wagons. In making up a six-mule team one had to have two gentle mules—the near pole mule that the driver uses as a saddle mule and a gentle

1. This paper has been edited to add identification and information only—for the most part Henry Avis' spelling and punctuation have been retained. As with the memories of any 81 year old gentleman, there are errors of fact and simplification. However, the gist of his story seems to be historically correct. Where available, other accounts given by Avis for parts of his story are provided in footnotes.

2. Born in St. Louis, Missouri on September 11, 1840 to Irish immigrant parents. In 1853 he had “came to Kansas City from St. Louis to tend bar for Bill Mulkey. At that time he had a saloon on the levee. It was not my first experience at that sort of work, for at the age of 12 I had tended bar on Missouri River steamboats. I worked for Mulkey three years, until he sold his saloon and gambling place....After that I worked for Nicaragua Walker, who had a bar in the old Gillis House. Walker was a lawyer, politician, gambler and saloonkeeper.” (*Kansas City Journal*, October 2, 1921 “Public Park is Monument to Early Settler.”) This reminiscence recounts Avis' experiences from roughly 1857 to 1867 when he travelled and worked as an express rider, gold prospector and Indian fighter in Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah. He returned to Kansas City in the late 1860s and briefly owned the old Delmonico saloon, between Third and Fourth Streets on Main Street. By 1870 he was working as a railroad contractor/laborer, and within a few years he was again employed by William Mulkey as a horse trainer and manager of Mulkey's famous stable of racehorses. This long and friendly association continues until Mulkey's death in 1907. Being 67 years old, Avis retired to his pastime of playing pool and telling stories of the old days (see *Kansas City Star*, April 4, 1917, “When the “Ponies” ran in Kansas City” and *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1921. “Former pony express rider is still a good shot.”) Avis' wife, Mollie, was born in West Virginia July 26, 1847 and came to Kansas City around 1860. They married in 1885 (she may have been married previously). Mollie Avis died January 11, 1923. Henry died in his Prospect Avenue home March 20, 1927.

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mule for the near leader. Only one line is used and that is on the near leader. You jerk the line to turn to the right and pull on the line to turn to the left, so if you had a good broken saddle mule and a broken leader you could, in a few days, break a team to drive.

Therefore, when I arrived at Leavenworth, I hired to a wagon-master by the name of Sam Stanton and he put me to help break mules. When the mules were first hitched up it required a man to each mule and then sometimes the mules would run away with the men hanging to their bridles and one was lucky if the mules did not jump on or kill him, for most of the mules had never had a bridle on and they were very wild.

I was raised in a city and had never handled any stock and was as green as a gourd, but was determined to do the best I could. So I was given a swing mule to hold and when they started they went away running and my mule had me off the ground about half the time, but I hung on like grim death until my hat blew off and I let go to get my hat. The wagon-master said, "I don't want you." I tell you I was discouraged. I was ashamed to go back home for I knew my friends would laugh at me, so that day I got to talking to a man who had made a trip to Mexico, and who had driven a bull team; I told him my troubles. He said, "Come, go with me, I am going down town to hire to Majors & Russell to drive a team." I went with him and hired to drive a bull team to Fort Laramie. He said he would help me until I could get broken in. I seemed to get along all right and before I got back I thought I could drive a bull team as good as anybody.

Now I want to relate a little instance that shows the ups and downs of the world. The same Sam Stanton who discharged me, ten years afterwards came to me for a job. He wanted to take charge of a train of twenty-six wagons and I let him have the train, but I said to him, "Sam, little did you think when you discharged me for being incompetent that you would ever come to me for employment."

The trip to Laramie was uneventful with the exception of a little incident that happened in my first buffalo hunt. When we arrived at the river South Platte, near Plum Creek, we struck our first buffalo, so when we camped that day another young fellow and myself took our guns and started out to kill buffalo, which we could see before leaving the train. We had not gone more than a half a mile until we ran across three big bulls lying down in a sand hole. They were about two hundred yards off when we first saw them, but they did not see us, so we went back down the hill and up a gully in order to get as close as possible to them. When we arrived at the top of the hill and looked over we were not more than fifty yards from them. I had never been close to a buffalo before and it was the first time my partner had ever seen one, and I tell you they looked fierce with their shaggy heads and long mains.

I raised up to shoot and told my partner to shoot the one on the right, and I would take the one on the left; but the looks of the bulls had frightened my partner and he grabbed my arm and said: "Don't shoot, for they will butt hell out of us." But I paid no attention to him and shot, and when I looked around my partner was running as fast as he could towards the train. I killed my bull and took the hump to camp. I told what my partner had said about the buffaloes "butting hell out of us, if we shot" and the boys in the train plagued him about it the balance of the trip.

In the fall of 1858 I hired to Major Dripps³, an old Indian trader, who had a trading post twenty miles this side at Fort Laramie. We started out with fifteen wagons, five yoke of cattle to each wagon, loaded down with goods to trade to the Indians. When we

3. Major Andrew Drips (1789-1860), was a "mountain man" associated with various fur companies, including the American Fur Company. His daughter Catherine, whose mother was an Otoe Indian, was educated in St. Louis and married William Mulkey of Kansas City, Henry Avis' employer, mentor, associate, and friend.

arrived at the trading post he sent out wagons and men to the different bands of Indians who were out hunting buffalo, and traded the goods to the Indians for robes and furs of all kinds; he also did quite a trade with the immigrants to California.

The government was running a tri-weekly mail to Salt Lake, so I quit the employ of Major Dripps and started to work for the mail company at about double the wages. The company had built a new station at Chimney Rock on the North Platte River; the agent there, whose name was Slade⁴, sent me to herd and take care of the mules. He sent a man with me to cook and help, but it was for only a little while until my partner got homesick and skipped out one night, taking with him a mule and my pistol. We started in pursuit and caught up with him on the South Platte and got the mule and hung the man, but I never got my pistol. Slade promised to send another man but never did and I stayed there all winter alone. The stage changed teams there every other day which kept me busy and kept me from getting lonesome. There were a great many Indians passing but I had no trouble with them. The wolves were troublesome. An old steer died about half a mile from the station and my partner and I poisoned the carcass; the first night we killed eighty wolves, so you can very easily imagine how numerous they were. While I was staying there Slade killed Jule⁵, a Frenchman, who kept the company station at South Platt, and cut his ears off and put them in his pocket. I did not blame Slade for killing Jule, but I did blame him for cutting his ears off after killing him. Jule had shot Slade about six months before that; and put thirty buck shot in his body. Slade lay at the point of death for a long time. Slade was afterwards hung by vigilantes at Virginia City, Montana, and his mistreatment of Jule was the principal thing held against him.⁶

The next fall the Pony Express was established in order to get quick communication between the states and California. Their regular time was ten days from St. Joseph, Missouri to Placerville, California. It took the stage twenty-six days, which followed the southern route, so the pony express made a saving of sixteen days. Only forty pounds of letters were carried. The business never paid for it was impossible to carry enough mail at a time to make it pay. We changed horses every twenty to thirty-five miles, according to where the stations were located. Just before Lincoln was to take his seat we were told to keep up all the good horses that were at the different stations because the government wanted to try to take his inaugural address in seven days and thereby beat the regular schedule three days. We had orders to make time or kill horses in the attempt and we took it through in seven days and seventeen hours, and would have made it in seven days only one of the regular riders was taken suddenly sick and the rider who took the sick man's place did not know and took the wrong road. His horse gave out and he lost precious hours. There never was such time made with horses and never will again for such a long distance.⁷

4. Joseph Alfred "Jack" Slade (also called "Alf," "Joe," "Jim," "Cap") (1831-1864).

5. Jules Beni, station keeper at the Upper Crossing.

6. Avis told this story for the *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1921: "Slade left Horseshoe ... and bought a ranch up near Helena. He was a wild, fearless sort o' fellow, and got drunk a lot. He had killed two or three men, and the vigilance committee was watching him pretty close.

"One night he got on a tear and started out to shoot up the town. They finally got him arrested and hauled him up before the justice of the peace. They were holding court in a little old store room and there was a good sized crowd about the place. Just as the law was about to pass sentence, Jim whipped out his old six-shooter and made the justice do a 'highland fling' right there before the whole crowd.

"The next night the vigilance fellows strung up thirty-two men. Jim was one of 'em."

7. Also from the *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1921: "And what about the time you carried President Lincoln's inaugural address?" someone asked.

The Missouri River to Sacramento in seven days and seventeen hours by horseback! If it sounds utterly impossible in this day of progress, what must it have seemed more than a half century ago. The achievement is not dwarfed when it is remembered that the regular trains of to-day make the distance in but little less than half the time.

The first pony rider taking the mail westward left St. Joseph, April 3, 1860. The distance between St. Joseph and Sacramento was covered in 232 hours.

The letters before being placed in the pockets of the rider were wrapped in oil skin to preserve them from moisture. The charge was originally \$5.00 for each letter of one-half ounce or less, but this was reduced to \$2.50, the charge being in addition to United States postage. Special light weight paper was generally used to reduce expense.

At first, stations were twenty-five miles apart, and each rider covered three stations daily. Two minutes was the maximum time allowed at stations, whether to change riders or horses.

The great feat of the Pony Express was the delivery of President Lincoln's inaugural address in 1861, which foreshadowed the administration's policy toward the rebellion. The entire journey was made in seven days and seventeen hours.

A few daredevil fellows generally did double duty and rode eighty or eighty-five miles. Charles Cliff was attacked by Indians at Scotts Bluff, receiving three balls in his body and twenty-seven in his clothes. Among the other famous riders were Col. William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill), Harry Roff and Jim McNaughton.

With the completion of the telegraph line in October, 1861, the Pony Express became a thing of the past. The old Concord coach still lumbered along, but it, too, was but the advance agent of the locomotive.

On the Jim Brumley Division of the Pony Express, which was from the south pass to Salt Lake, a distance of nearly three hundred miles, an average speed of eighteen miles an hour was attained. I know that when I arrived at the Sand Hill station, thirty miles this side of Laramie, I could just see day breaking. I went to Birdoe's Station⁸, which was twenty miles further, saddled my horse and was five miles above there when the sun rose, which was about one hour and twenty minutes after the break of day. We did not gallop but ran our horses as fast as they could go. We had orders to make time or kill our horses. We had a splendid lot of horses, thoroughbred horses, bred on mustang mares, the finest saddle horses in the world. I did not hear of a single horse that died from the effects of the ride. I rode the express until the telegraph line was finished, which was about two years later.

In 1861 the Indians got very bad. There was a big immigration to California and Salt

"Oh, there wasn't much to that except speed." The old horseman replied. "I was running then, from South Platte to the foot of Rocky Ridge, about ten miles from South Pass. We had been told the message was coming and were all ready for it. The orders were to make record time or kill horses, and I recon we did both.

"I was waiting at South Platte with my horse all saddled and ready to go, when I saw Sam Custard coming with the pouch. Sam lived at Lexington, Mo. A good horseman he was, too. He had a big, gray mare, a beautiful animal.

"He came up at top speed, dismounted and handed me the bag. Then he looked up into that horse's eyes and it just seemed to me he most have read her feelings. He pushed her head to one side and started to walk away. The mare tumbled over in a heap. I hated to leave her, too, but I had to be on with the message.

"I covered my ninety miles in a little better than eight hours, but Jim Brumely, who took the pouch from me at the foot of Rocky Ridge, set a record of eighteen miles and hour from there to Salt Lake City."

8. Badeau's Station?

Lake and the road was full of wagon trains; there was scarcely a day but what some train was attacked by the Indians. The war was going on and the Indians evidently thought it was a good time to kill and plunder. They got so bad that the government sent General Craig from St. Joseph with five thousand troops to fight the Sioux Indians, and the emigrants had to travel in large bodies to protect themselves. The stage and pony express riders took many chances, but the Indians did not care to attack the stage or the express, excepting when they had no emigrants to attack, for they knew that when they attacked the stage or express that the government would send troops after them. But the poor emigrants had to protect themselves, which they did to a certain extent, but a great many inexperienced ones would try to travel in small parties and the Indians would swoop down on them and take all their stock and kill some of them.

A telegraph line was under construction in 1861 and had been built as far west as Deer Creek on the North Platte. I was riding a ninety mile route from Mud Springs to Horseshoe Creek, which was Slade's headquarters for the division. There were always fifteen or twenty men at this station. One day just before I arrived at Deer Creek with the express the operator telegraphed down that a big band of Sioux, about five hundred strong, had surrounded the station and he was looking for them to attack it any minute. The regular rider refused to go and Slade discharged him and tried to get someone to go on with the express. No one would go for it was necessary to go to Deer Creek to change horses and it looked like certain death to go. Slade came to me and said, "Hank, you will have to go." I told him I was tired and did not care to go. "Well," he said, "I can't get any one else to go, so you go and you won't lose anything by it." He said, "tell John when you arrive at Wagon Hound, which was the station next to Deer Creek, to give you that big American horse and keep a good look-out for Indians and if you see them first they can't catch you." The horse I was riding was the fastest horse on the road, but the trouble was to see the Indians first. After I left Wagon Hound I was very careful whenever I came to a hill. I would stop my horse, pull off my hat and walk slowly to the top and take a good look all around and if I did not see any Indians I would go as fast as my horse could carry me until I reached the next hill. I kept on doing that until I got to the station, but the Indians had gone before I arrived. I was then informed that the Indians told them to turn the horses and cattle out of the corrals and they would not make any attack on the people. The horses and cattle were turned over to the Indians and they had departed from Deer Creek when I arrived. I did not see a single Indian on the trip. The telegraph line was finished that fall and that put a stop to the express for the winter.⁹

9. Avis elaborates this story to the *Kansas City Star* reporter and a group of listeners in a pool hall in the May 15, 1921 paper: "Take the time the Sioux Indians were on the warpath out in Wyoming. I was riding the route from Horseshoe Creek to Platte bridge. That bridge, you know, was the one the forty-niners had built just two or three years before.

"It was about the time the telegraph was going through to the coast. It had [illegible] Horseshoe and got as far as Deer Creek, two stations beyond, they had an operator every sixty mile on the [illegible].

One night I'd just come in after riding all day when Jim Slade—he was our agent there—come running out to meet me, all excited like.

"'The Sioux have surrounded Deer Creek,' he said. 'They may attack any time. I can't get any of the boys to go on there. You'll have to go, Hank.'

"Well, I was pretty tired, but I told Jim I'd take a chance. He told me to stop at Wagon Hound—that's the first station this side of Deer Creek—and make them give me that big Kentucky horse. Oh, he was a proud animal, too—about seventeen hands high, a lively stepper.

"I felt a lot better after I mounted that Kentuckian. It was only a few miles on to Deer Creek but I knew there might be a redskin behind any tree or bush along the road. When I'd come to a

Slade sent me with a herd of cattle and horses off the main road to winter where grass was good and sent a man with me, but put a fictitious name on the pay roll and gave the money to me which I drew for about six months. That is the way he paid me for riding when nobody else would go. Slade kept me riding that same route from Horseshoe to North Platte Bridge.

One day while I was stopping at Platte Bridge waiting for the express to come (going east) two men came along going to the states. They had come all the way from California. Both were riding good horses and each led a pack horse. They were fine looking men and well to do. That evening the express came and twenty miles below I came upon them lying in the road, dead; they had evidently just been killed by Indians. The Indians stripped and scalped them and had taken their horses. It could not have been more than half an hour for the blood was still running out of the bullet holes. I went on to the station about two miles away and told the men and the bodies of the dead men were buried. I learned afterwards that they could see the Indians' foot prints near where the dead bodies lay in a wash-out near the road.

When I was laying over at Mud Springs "Bill" Hickcock,¹⁰ afterwards known as "Wild Bill," had just come from his home in Illinois. He was about twenty years old, a nice quiet young man, the last man in the world I would think of becoming a desperado. We slept together and I found him very agreeable, but shortly after that Slade sent him and another man to distribute mules along the road. Everything went all right with them until they arrived at Rock Creek in Kansas. They stopped all night at the Rock Creek station and while staying there a man came to the station and said that a party of three Kansas Jayhawkers, all drunk, were coming to kill the station keeper, who had previously had some trouble with them. When they saw them coming they all ran to the hills but Bill. They wanted him to go too for they said they were bad men and would kill him if they caught him at the station. Bill said, "They have nothing against me." He was not afraid and when the three men came Bill was standing in the door of the station. They said, "What in hell are you doing here?" Bill tried to explain, but they would not listen to him. They had gotten off their horses and told Bill to get to the hills and one of the trio took a shot at him. Bill had backed into the house. Bill whipped out his pistol and shot the man who had shot at him. One of the dead man's partners ran to his side and Bill shot him, and the third man, seeing both of his partners fall, started to run and Bill ran to the door of the station, picked up his rifle, dropped down on one knee, took deliberate aim and killed the third man who was running as rapidly as possible and who was then nearly a hundred yards away.

I was well acquainted with Bill Hickcock before and after he became a desperado, and I must say that he was the coolest man under fire I have ever known. He was never

rise I'd get off and lead my horse to the top. It was moonlight and I could see very well to the top of the next hill.

"I was crossing a little creek a few miles out of Wagon Hound. It was about knee deep and I stopped to give my horse a drink. Something cracked the brush behind me and that young blue blood let out a jump that almost unseated me. A sudden pain struck me in the back and I had a kind o' sick feeling when I reached back to see if there was any blood there.

"It was just a 'crick' in my spine. I guess it must have been a deer that jumped up, for it kept on running off through the brush. Anyway, I was more cautious after that and didn't pass a tree or clump of bushes without making sure what was behind it.

"When I got to Deer Creek the Indians had been there and gone. They had promised not to harm anybody if the citizens would turn out all their horses and cattle. There was scarcely a head of stock left near the place."

10. James Butler Hickok (1837-1876).

known to shoot at a man whom he did not kill. He killed eight or ten men—I can't remember the exact number—but I don't think he ever killed a man unjustly. I believe he would have been acquitted by any court of justice for any crime or for any shooting in which he participated. He was not a quarrelsome man. I have seen him take a lot of abuse to keep out of a fight, and to a man who did not know him would say he was a coward, but when the ball opened he was the greatest fighter of all gunmen. He was killed at Deadwood, South Dakota by a man who slipped up behind him and shot him while Bill was playing cards. The man who did the shooting was hung for his crime.

In the spring of 1862 there was great excitement over the Salmon River mines, so I concluded I would quit the road and go to the mines. I had saved about fifteen hundred dollars and I bought four mules, a wagon and one year's supply of food. I was determined that I would not starve if I did not strike gold. I persuaded a young fellow by the name of Jeff Harrington to go with me. He had about three hundred dollars. I told him, if he would go, I would divide as long as I had a cent, so we started out with light hearts for we had a fine outfit. We traveled with a large emigrant train consisting of about seventy-five wagons. They were mostly all running away from the war and were the most cowardly lot of men I ever saw. I did not think it possible for so many cowards to have gotten together in one band. One day I was driving the team and Jeff was riding one of the mules. Jeff came riding back on the run and said, "Hand me my rifle." I said, "What's up?" He said, "The Indians have attacked a herder with a band of mules and I am going out to help him." By that time the mules, herder and Indians came in sight, all running as fast as they could. There were eleven Indians and the Indians were trying to head off the mules from the train and the herder was trying to drive the mules toward the train. The Indians would get them started away from the train and the herder would whip up his horse and turn them toward the train. They were not more than five hundred yards from the train and we would see every move the Indians made. They kept shooting at the herder, but he was determined to save the mules. My partner tried to get some of the men to go to the herder's rescue, but only three out of about three hundred would go to help a fellow man in distress. I thought it was the most cowardly trick I ever heard of, but my partner, myself and two others ran out and commenced shooting at the Indians and they left, and the herder brought the mules to camp in triumph. He was bleeding in three places from bullet wounds and the Indians had shot his horse twice. If ever a man deserved a medal that man did, for he did not seem to know what fear was. The train stopped while the fight was going on and I heard several men say, "Go on, get on, they are not bothering us."

We left the train at Green River and traveled with another train of fifteen wagons. We wanted to go to Fort Hall on Snake River. We had passed through the Sioux country all right and we thought we were safe from Indians. We were in the Bannock and Snake country and those tribes were supposed to be friendly to the whites. We therefore did not guard against Indians very closely. We traveled along all right until we got to Soda Springs on Bear River. There was a party of ten Indians who said they were Bannocks and appeared to be very friendly. We fed them at dinner and went on our way after dinner leaving the Indians still in camp. They said they were going to steal horses from the Sioux. We camped that evening just at sundown near the springs. We had just got all our horses and mules unharnessed and turned loose and had driven them across the road from the wagons, leaving one man to guard them until we cooked supper. We saw the same Indians coming up the road that we had left in camp at noon and we therefore paid little attention to them. We had a hundred and five head of horses and mules, all fine stock. Just as the Indians got between the wagons and stock they raised

the war—whoop and shook their blankets and started the herd of horses and mules on the run. We had our guns in the wagons, little thinking of trouble. We all sprang for our guns. The Indians had to go only about two hundred yards before they were over the hill in the river bottom. They had the herd on a dead run and we had to run about two hundred yards before we got to the top of the hill before we could see them and when we got to the top of the hill they were at least five hundred yards away and out of gun shot. We fired at them but they were too far away, so we left there without horses. The Indians had taken all but one horse; that one was hobbled and could not keep up with the balance of the herd. One of the Indians got down and tried to cut the hobbles, but the man on guard kept shooting at him, so he went on and left the horse. It was no use to follow them on foot, so we went back about two miles to an ox train where we could raise only five horses. When we got back to our train it was very dark, so we had to give up trying to follow the Indians. The next morning we tried to get some horses but there were none to be had. The Indians were fifty to seventy-five miles away, so there we were with fifteen heavily loaded wagons and not a horse or a mule to hitch to them. The next day a large train came along and I offered one man in the train my wagon and a year's provisions if he would board us through. But we had to walk. It was about seventy-five miles to Fort Hall, an old trading post, where we could buy animals to ride. When we arrived at Snake River, it was very full of water and there was no ferry. We made boats out of our wagon boxes; we corked them tightly and roped them together and all of us managed to get across in good shape. We lost a few horses by trying to lead them behind the boats. There were a lot of Indians camped at the trading post (Fort Hall) and they agreed to swim our horses for a dollar a head. The river was about half a mile wide and the current was very swift and strong. Some white men tried to swim their horses, but some of them were drowned in the attempt. They could not manage their horses in the swift water like the Indians, so the Indians got the contract to take the horses across. There were many horses, for there was now more than a hundred wagons in the train. The Indians did not lose a single horse for us. They took them over one at a time. They would ride them into swimming water, put the bridle rein in their mouths, drop in on the lower side, put one hand on the horses' neck and swim with the other hand and they could steer them any way they wanted to go. My partner and I bought two nice ponies from the Indians and we felt like we were ourselves again. When we left there were over a hundred wagons in the train, some going to the mines and some to Oregon.

We went by the three Buttes, which was fifty miles shorter than following the Snake River. The second day from Fort Hall ten Indians came to our camp who had any amount of twenty-dollar gold pieces. They had waylaid an outfit of six men, three wagons with six mules to each wagon, killing five of the men, but one got away. The man who owned the outfit had ten thousand dollars in gold. He was one of those headstrong men who said he was not afraid of the Indians and would travel alone. He lost his life as did also four of his men by being foolish. The Indians traded about two thousand dollars of the money for blankets and firearms. One Indian offered me six twenty-dollar gold pieces for my pistol, which cost me twenty dollars, but I could not have taken fifty twenty-dollar gold pieces for it then, for I considered it one of my best friends. Some of the boys wanted to go and kill all of the Indians who had about one hundred head of good horses and mules, which they had stolen from the emigrants. Some of the Indians rode two mules into our camp which my partner had driven for the mail company. We traded our two ponies for the two mules by giving eighty dollars to boot. We got two fine mules; one of them was the best leader on the division. Besides the mules and horses they had the ten thousand dollars in gold which they had taken from

the men they had killed. The leader of our party asked me if I would go and help kill the Indians; he said we would then take the stock and strike for the settlements, about four hundred miles away. I said, "Yes, I would go," for I felt almost desperate because they had robbed me of all my savings of six years work on the mail road which was fifteen hundred dollars. I was asked to be ready to go at day-light. The Indians' camp was only a mile from ours and my partner and I were ready the next morning, but the Indians had left that night and the thing fell through. I was glad of it for we could not have reached the settlements, as we would have been compelled to pass two large villages of Indians of about one hundred lodges each and it is likely that all of our band would have been killed.

We forded Boise River near where Boise City now is. The river was high and very swift and two men and two horses were drowned while trying to cross the river. We camped after crossing and nine prospectors came to our camp and said they had been prospecting about twenty miles from there and that the Indians had killed one of their party whose name was Grimes and they called the creek, on whose banks we were camping, "Grimes' Creek." They had found plenty of gold, they said, but would not tell us just where they had found it. The prospectors were from Oregon and they did not want anyone to know about their find until they went back home and told all their friends. So we were near to and passed by mines that would have made us all rich. That same winter those same mines paid from two to five hundred dollars a day per man. It was the best poor man's camp that was ever struck in those mountains. It was all placer diggings, very shallow, from three to ten feet to bedrock, with plenty of claims that paid from three to five thousand dollars to the claim, so it gave the poor man a chance to make a small stake quickly.

After leaving Boise we went on until we came to Powder River. Some gold had been found there and two or three hundred men were working. A few claims paid well, but most of them did not. We each took up a claim and went to work and built us a nice warm cabin and made preparations to stay all winter. About the first of December the nine prospectors whom we had met at Boise River went home, got all their friends together, went back to Boise and when they had taken up all the best claims they gave the news of their find to the world; there was a big stampede to Boise basin. When we heard of the strike we were all excited. I had about forty dollars and a mule left out of the one thousand five hundred dollars I had when I left the mail road. I tried to get some of the boys to go. They said they were too well situated there to leave before spring; that they would not starve to death before spring; I was determined to go. I went to a little town called Auburn and all was excitement there. I met one man I knew. He wanted to go but had no money. I told him I had a good mule that could pack four hundred pounds, but that I had no grub. He said, "I can get all the grub I want from a friend of mine who is keeping store." So we loaded the mule with provisions of all kinds. We had to walk, which was very hard on us as we were always used to riding. He said, "I know a friend from whom I think I can borrow some money by promising to take up a claim for him." In this way he bought a horse and we had only one horse to ride between us. But we arrived at the mines all right. We prospected for about ten days, found plenty of claims, most all small gulch claims, three and four feet to bedrock, that could be worked out in about six weeks time which would pay from two to five thousand dollars each. The Big Creek claims had all been taken. It was December and we looked for it to commence snowing any day, which it did and never quit until the snow was twelve feet deep on the level. The party I was with all went back to Powder River but myself and a man by the name of McItee. All of them hated me for staying, saying, "You have

no money." I hadn't enough grub to last three weeks and everything was one dollar a pound. But I told them if anybody was living there in the spring I would be one of them. I knew I was tough and hardy and was willing to tackle anything in the way of work. I had my eye on a little claim so that if the worst came I could build a big fire and knock out enough to live on, for wood was plentiful. Mac and I put us up a little cabin, ten by twelve, and made a rocker and commenced to rock. We took out four or five dollars in about two hours. The snow was twelve feet deep and it drew all the frost out of the ground; we had no trouble digging and felt pretty safe for the winter. We had located a number of small claims and I commenced trading and selling claims. Prospectors were coming in thick from Oregon; a good many had money and I sold one claim for a thousand dollars and one for five hundred dollars; before long I had twenty-five hundred dollars. People were paying twenty-five cents a pound to pack from Powder River, about one hundred and fifty miles, and it looked to me like there would be a lot of money in it for I could buy horses, good ones, from the Oregons for from forty to fifty dollars. The snow was twelve feet deep and they had no place to keep them. I went to buying horses for a pack train. I bought twenty-nine head and my mule made thirty head, and I started for Powder River. I hired a good packer who had packed for several years in California and I thought I was on the road to make some money. The first night out I stopped with some boys who were off the mail road, who had built a good house and a picket corral on the Piate River, which was in a fine valley and grass was good. We kept our horses in the corral over night, for the Indians had been stealing horses every few days. Next morning we turned our horses out to grass, for two or three hours before starting. The morning was foggy. One could not see over fifty yards. We sat down to breakfast; the horses were grazing all round the house and while we were eating breakfast they remained out of sight in the fog; so in about an hour we went out to drive the horses in and we could not find them anywhere. Then we knew the Indians had driven them off, for the trail was going straight to Snake River. We had no horses nor men with which to follow them, so I wandered back to camp feeling heartsick at my luck, for that was the second time inside of six months that the Indians had taken everything I possessed and left me almost without a dollar.

The next day I started back over the mountains to the mines to start all over again. I had a small claim left that I thought I could sell for a small amount. As I was going back over the mountain I met an old forty-niner from California and we sat down on a log to rest. I told him my troubles and said I did not feel like trying to do anything for myself, for luck was against me. I said I believed I would go back to the mail road. He said, "Young man, when you have roamed over these mountains as long as I have, you will get used to being broke, but don't give up the ship. If you are knocked down, get up and try it again and you will surely get there." I have always remembered those words in my journey through life when things were going against me.

When I arrived in Centerville the first man I met was my old partner. He had struck a small claim and was taking out about twenty dollars a day. It was Sunday and all the miners would go to town on Sunday. The town was full of miners and there was much gambling going on. I told Mac about losing my train and said I wanted to borrow one hundred dollars. He said, "Henry, you divided your last twenty-dollar gold piece with me to buy a pair of boots last fall and to show you that I am not ungrateful here is a sack of dust of seven hundred dollars. Take it, I can make more." I took it from him, for I could see that he had been drinking heavily and I was afraid he would gamble it away. But next morning I gave it back to him and kept a hundred dollars, but he insisted on my keeping it all. I said all I wanted was enough to buy grub with.

Jeff Stanford was raising a company to go out to fight the Indians who were stealing stock and killing emigrants. I was too eager to go, for I thought I might come across some of the stock they had stolen from me. Every man had to furnish his own horse and pack-horse. We left camp with one hundred and fifty men, as fine a body of men as ever got together; most all old miners and mountainmen, all good riders and fine shooters. The first day out we ran across twelve Indians. They were all on foot making for the main road to steal and plunder. They saw us about the same time we saw them. They tried to hide in the tall grass, thinking we had not seen them, and were about two miles away. We changed our course so they thought we were going past them and they laid still until we got about even with them. We wheeled quickly and broke for them; the Snake River was only a little way from them and we knew they would try to get across the river to the hilly country. When we wheeled and started for them they broke for the river, just as we suspected they would. They were on foot and we were on horses and when we got to the river bank they were swimming for dear life. The river was about a quarter of a mile wide and very deep. We jumped off our horses and commenced shooting and although we could only see their heads we killed every one of them before they could get across. The river was deep and we never saw one of them after they sank. We camped there that night and were highly elated over our first day's result.

We crossed Snake River next day and struck for the Ougle country. About the third day out, as we were leaving camp in the morning, we climbed a hill and could see four or five miles ahead of us. About two miles off we could see one lonely horseman. We drew up in line and someone said it was an Indian and we started, one hundred and fifty of us, after that lone man, all yelling and laughing. It was a great sight to see one hundred and fifty men going over the level prairie after one lone man. Some of the boys were on fast horses and they out-distanced me, after we had gone quite a distance. When the leaders got close to him (his horse had already given out) he commenced throwing off his blankets and camp outfit and then the boys saw it was a white man. They yelled at him to stop, but he could not hear; he had got within about a half mile of some timber on a creek and he started to run for the timber. The boys caught him before he got there, and if you ever saw a frightened Dutchman, it was this man. He took us to be Indians and when we got close to him he did not have time to look back. He proved to be a German, spoke very brokenly and it was very laughable to hear him tell his thoughts when those one hundred and fifty Indians were after him.

We kept traveling slowly, hunting for Indian signs; the grass was bad and we had to take care of our horses. We finally ran across ten Indians, all on foot, going toward the main road to steal horses. We got after them and they got on to a rocky point covered with big boulders, which was a good hiding place for them. One of the Indians was lame and could not keep up; we took him prisoner and kept him for about two weeks. We surrounded the point of rocks and kept a close guard so that none of the Indians could escape, and about fifty of our men, all with good rifles, went among the rocks to drive them out. There were only three Indians who had guns and the balance had bows and arrows. Most all these men were old Indian fighters and could beat them at their own game. They had to be very cautious, however, and it took all day to kill the nine remaining Indians. Some of the boys had narrow escapes—hats and locks of hair shot off. It was only the bad marksmanship of the Indians that saved our men. One old Indian was shot nine times before he was killed. He was game until the last.

We divided our command so we could hunt the country thoroughly for we wanted to clear up all the little bands that were stealing from the emigrants. Going along the main road we kept running across small bands from two to ten or twelve and would kill

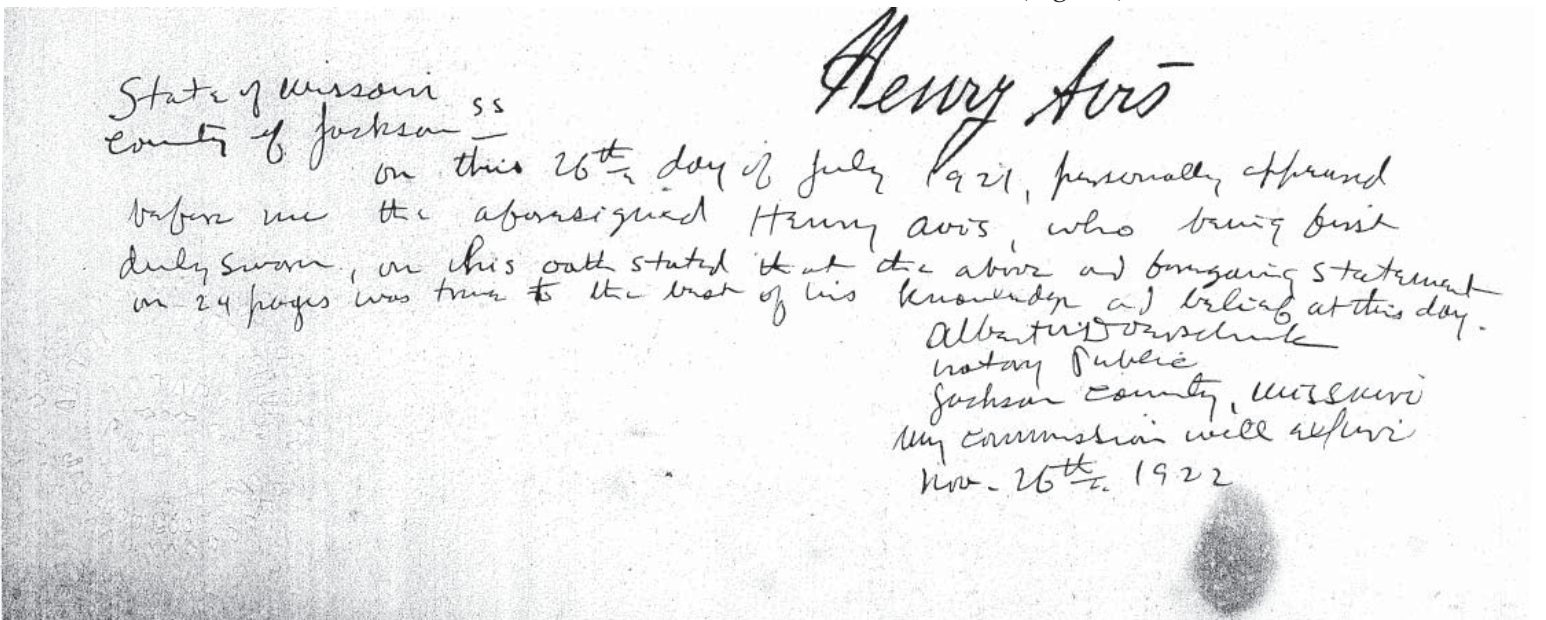
them all. Finally we ran across a big trail, fresh, of about one hundred and fifty Indians, only a day or two old. We took the trail and found them in a big cave where they had thrown up breastworks. They had known of our coming and were prepared for us. They had a great many women and children with them and they kept them in the cave. Our scouts located them and that night we threw up breastworks of rock and in some places dug trenches, so when morning came we had them surrounded. The Indians exposed themselves the first day and shot at us, but they soon found out that wouldn't do, for we were not over one hundred and fifty yards away. We had a lot of Hawkins rifles. One could hit a bull's eye that far away and we were all good shooters. The Indians didn't have a chance for they had mostly small bore rifles which were out of date. We remained there three days and fought them. We did not want to rush them for fear of some of us getting killed; we knew they were in a strong position. When an Indian gets in a close place, so he can't run, he will die braver than most white men. We also knew they did not have much to eat and that they could not stay there very long. Just at sundown on the third day they yelled out that they wanted to talk. We had several men who could talk Snake and we told them if they would send ten Indians to our camp to be held for hostage until morning we would treat with them and we would not hurt the men if they kept their word. They sent over nine big bucks. We treated them finely and gave them plenty to eat. We did not put out guards to watch the others, so to our surprise, next morning, they were all gone and then we did not know what to do with the nine Indians we held as hostage. We held a council in order to try to determine what should be done. Some were for killing them and some were for taking them back with us to the mines. Finally one man got up and said, "Boys, let me pronounce judgment." He pulled out his pistol and commenced shooting at the Indians and then everybody went to shooting and we killed all of the Indians in a very few minutes. It seemed cruel to kill them, but we could not turn them loose and they had given themselves up as hostages for the others. We tried to follow the main band but they scattered out in small numbers and took to the rocky ridges, so we could not trail them. We ran across some eight or ten and killed them and took one squaw prisoner. We took her back to the mines and the last I saw of her she was cooking for a mining outfit. We had one Indian prisoner whom we kept for about two weeks. We treated him nicely and he acted as if he was contented. But it was time for going home and we did not know what to do with him. The Captain, Jeff Stanford, said he did not care what we did with him. One of the boys said, "we will take care of him on the march." We always tied a rope around his arm and led him, for all of us had good horses and we made the Indian walk. One morning after we had gone about a mile one of the boys rode up behind the Indian, got down off his horse and cocked his rifle. The Indian heard him cock his gun and turned his head. He turned his face away from the man with the gun and stood as straight as an arrow. He was shot through the back of the head and fell dead. We went on and left him for the wolves to eat.

Another interesting incident occurred when we were laying behind our breastworks. The Indians would stick a hat on a pole and show it above their works; if we did not shoot at it in a little while an Indian would stick up his head and he would not get it up more than six inches before fifteen or twenty guns would crack and there would be another dead Indian. As we lay there watching for heads one of the boys passed along where I lay and started to look over the breastworks. One of our boys said, "Don't you try to look for you will get your head shot off." But he said, "I am going to take one look." He did not get his head more than six inches in the air than he fell and rolled down the hill. We commenced shooting at the Indians when we saw our comrade fall.

One of the boys went down to where he was and yelled back that he was not dead, for he was batting his eyes. The bullet had only grazed him and knocked him unconscious. He was all right in a few days and he was the only man who was wounded during the campaign. We were out six weeks and killed one hundred and ten Indians and did not lose a single man. We were all heroes when we got back to the mines; we had put a stop to the Indians depredations. But I did not get back any of the horses the Indians had stolen from me. They had very few horses and we concluded that they had eaten them, for it was a hard winter and game was scarce.

When I got back to the mines the snow was melting and every one had commenced to mine. During the winter three boys off the mail road came to the mines and bought a claim on Grimes Creek. They paid five hundred dollars for it. They had only three hundred dollars and I loaned them two hundred more to finish paying for the claim. They had just gotten the tail race finished and were ready to commence work. When I told them of my misfortune of losing my train they said, "We will all work out the claim together." We worked it out in about three months and I had for my share three thousand dollars. I bought another train and remained in the country until the spring of 1867. I then came down the Missouri River all the way to Omaha and took a steamboat to Kansas City. When I arrived there I had enough gold to buy ten thousand dollars in greenbacks. One Hundred in Gold was worth one hundred eighty-five in greenbacks.

(Signed)—HENRY AVIS.



State of Missouri
County of Jackson

On this 26th day of July 1921, personally appeared before me the aforesigned Henry Avis, who being first duly sworn, on his oath stated that the above and forgoing statement on 24 pages was true to the best of his knowledge and belief at this day.

Albert Doescheck

Notary Seal

Notary Public
Jackson County, Missouri
My commission will expire
Nov. 26th, 1922.