“I FEAR THE CONSEQUENCES TO OUR ANIMALS”
EMIGRANTS AND THEIR LIVESTOCK
ON THE OVERLAND TRAILS

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“You cannot be too careful of your teams; on their condition depends entirely your success in getting through” to the Pacific coast, warned Philip L. Platt and N. Slater in their 1852 *Travelers’ Guide across the Plains upon the Overland Route to California.* The diaries, letters, and guidebooks written by the emigrants who crossed North America on the overland trails during the mid-nineteenth century reveal a new awareness of the animals that journeyed with them. Often written as advice to those who might follow them, the travelers worried about their animals in ways beyond what theologians and philosophers would have expected or anticipated. Borne out of the need to get to California, Oregon, or Utah safely, emigrants learned a new standard of care required for the animals that hauled them across the continent. Their writings add to the knowledge not only of the rigors and challenges along the overland trails but also of how the emigrants manifested a new relationship with their livestock.

Between 1840 and 1860 approximately 300,000 people emigrated to California, Oregon, and Utah. The reasons for traveling three to five months over nearly 2,000 miles included the desire for gold, a farm, or religious freedom. Numerous books on the history of the American West and the overland trails fill library shelves, yet the authors largely ignore the domestic animals that went west with the human travelers.

During the last forty years, historians have begun to look at the significance of animals in history, yet most have concentrated on the British colonial era in North America. Authors such as Alfred W. Crosby Jr. and William Cronon first looked at the impact of European

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