

## **Francis Parker (1788 Clarendon, VT – 1865 Santa Fe Trail, NM)**

- From: *Background of Iowa Territorial Pioneers : As Exemplified by the Ancestry of Francis Parker and his wife Rhoda Chaplin*, Chaplin Gurney Gue, 1945

"... Vermont military records show that Benjamin went to the Green Mountain country and settled on what was known as the North Flat of Otter Creek, near where the village of Clarendon grew up.

There his son Francis was born in 1788 and the father died in 1812, two or three years after the marriage of Francis to Rhoda Chaplin. Their wedding took place at Reading, where she was born. After the marriage they lived at Cavendish, Clarendon, Rutland and Windsor. Five of their eight children were born before the "Westward, Ho!" movement in or about 1828 lured the restless head of the family to the widely heralded Genessee Valley in New York, where they found a new home and occupation at Philipsburg, later Belmont, in Allegheny County.

Here for a decade Francis Parker was the prosperous owner of a four-hundred-acre farm and home which he called Mount Hope--a name possibly suggested by what he had heard of the headquarters of the Indian chief known to the whites as King Philip, son of Massasoit--and which was located a few miles from the now fashionable summer resort of Newport in Rhode Island. Besides the farm Francis Parker carried on a saw-mill and a cloth-finishing industry where woolen cloth spun and woven by women of the neighborhood was fulled, dyed and finished.

The financial panic of 1837 and the economic depression which followed--more devastating than any other in the history of the country up to that of 1929--swept away almost everything he owned in Philipsburg, causing him again to go further "out west." This time the destination of the covered wagon was Iowa Territory, or "the Black Hawk Purchase," as it was better known in the East.

Jonathan Parker, an older brother of Francis, had gone in 1836 with his two sons, Jonathan Wetherbee Parker and George Washington Parker, to the then new settlement of Davenport on the west bank of the Mississippi River, opposite Rock Island. It was the glowing accounts of

this region which they brought back that led Francis to select it, though he did not do so until he had first inspected it himself in 1839.

In a graphic and interesting account of everyday life in the pioneer period, written seventy years after and deposited with the Iowa Historical Society at the State University in Iowa City, Celinda Sarah Parker has told how her father and his sons, Benjamin Harrison and Francis Jackson, labored throughout the winter before making this exploratory expedition; sawing lumber and hauling it on sleds drawn by horses and oxen over the snow to the bank of Olean Creek, near the neighboring village of Cuba, N. Y., and there forming it into a great raft. Then, when spring came and all the streams were running bank-high, they gathered up their few necessaries, said goodbye one morning and got aboard the raft to push off, floating down the creek to the Allegheny River, thence to the Ohio, and down that broad waterway to some point near its confluence with the broader Mississippi, where they sold the raft for the lumber it contained, and made their way on a steamboat up to Davenport.

The father returned to his home in the fall, coming from Chicago by boat on the Great Lakes to Buffalo. On arrival at Philipsburg he gave the village wagon-builder an order for a stout vehicle fourteen feet long and specially constructed for the journey. It was not until the autumn of 1840 that all was ready and the long trip westward was begun. In the wagon besides Francis Parker and his wife Rhoda Chaplin were their daughters Nancy Diantha, then twenty-six years old and the wife of John E. Owen; Mary Chaplin, aged sixteen; Rhoda Maria, thirteen years old; Celinda Sarah, aged ten; Elizabeth, aged seven, and Laura Lucinda, aged three. Just behind them was another wagon which conveyed the household effects and a large box of fruit-trees to be planted in their new home. When the weather was pleasant they camped beside the road, some of them sleeping on the ground. In wet weather they found a hospitable welcome at night in the homes of settlers along the way who had perhaps themselves been "movers" to a new frontier in their younger days.

After many days and weeks crowded with new experiences and a few adventures they reached the end of their long journey after dark one night at the home of George W. Parker, near the northwest corner of Scott County. Close by his cousin's place Francis rented a house which stood "just where now stands the first farm house east and north of the first cross-roads south of the Parker [now Pioneer] Cemetery."

Of the home life of Francis Parker and his helpmate, Rhoda Chaplin, the little I have learned is in the personal recollections of Celinda Parker Dutton. Writing of Philipsburg days she says:

"Father was always busy except in the evening, which he devoted chiefly to reading. With a candle on the table beside him he would sit until bed-time with the "National Intelligencer" or the "Albany Journal" before him; newspapers that came to him for many years. What he read in these papers were the things he preferred to talk about, rather than the happenings and gossip of the neighborhood. He had only scorn for novel reading, and we girls had to keep out of his sight when we were reading the few novels we could borrow. He took much interest in politics and was a strong Whig until he became an Abolitionist and later a Republican. He was a Universalist in religion, but had little to say on religious subjects, though once in Vermont he had a debate with an orthodox minister on Universalism. From what I heard him say his father was intemperate in the use of liquor, but father himself never took a drink and never used tobacco. He was, in fact, opposed to both. Even when old he always broke our colts to ride and drive and was a skilled horseman. Though scarcely up to the average height, he was erect in carriage, full chested and compact in build. His walk was brisk and spry. His eyes were blue and very keen; his hair brown, fine and rather thin. It never turned gray. He was always smooth-shaven. He appeared very neat when dressed in his "best suit" that he kept for Sundays and special occasions. He kept bees and was fond of locating the hives of wild bees, both in New York and in Iowa, and he often spent Sundays in bee-hunting. In his youth he played the clarinet. He was never a good provider for the family table or wardrobe.

"I never saw mamma's father, Moses Chaplin, but Diantha, when a little girl visited his home in Vermont. At that period he was a farmer living at Clarendon. As she described him he was a tall man with long features and an especially long chin. He wore his hair in a queue, and was a strict disciplinarian; made his hired men sit up straight at table and insisted on good behavior. Sometimes when company came he would set out a decanter of rum. He was firm in manner and commanding in appearance. On this occasion he presented her with a hymn book, some leaves from which Diantha gave me.

"I think Mama must have resembled her father. She was of average height with very dark brown hair and blue eyes. She was a good talker, easy to visit, and enjoyed company. She was always at work, it seemed

to me. About her only rest was at night after her children had gone to bed. Then she would partake of her only indulgence--a single pipe full of tobacco which she lighted with a coal from the fireplace, and smoked before going to bed. Not long after we went to Iowa we found a young wild goose that had been injured so that it was unable to fly. It soon became domesticated and developed a strong attachment for Mama. It became her inseparable companion, and, like Mary's lamb, followed her wherever she went, even when she visited neighbors at a considerable walking distance ...

"Once when Father and Jackson were away from home on some long journey the rest of the family--Mamma, Rhoda, Mary, Elizabeth and Laura--were taken sick with some kind of a fever. I escaped it and had to do my best to take care of all the sick ones. They were all thirsty all the time, so it seemed to me, and they wanted water as cold as they could get it, which meant right out of the spring. Quite often I would have to go after it in the middle of the night, and I shall never forget how terrified I was as I ran swiftly through the silent darkness to the spring. It was in the fall of the year, and as I sat in the house at night alone with all those sick ones around me the only sound that reached my ears was the drone of autumnal insects. To this day the annual fall concert of insects brings back those days and gives me a feeling of intense loneliness.

"When Mary began to teach school I was one of her first pupils. It was afterwards that I attended school in Davenport and boarded with Uncle Jonathan Parker and Aunt Naomi Titus. Uncle Jonathan had a large library and was a great reader. He was a kindly, gentle man, and lacked Father's asperity. His views about novel-reading were quite different from Father's, for he was a habitual reader of fiction. The sorrows and misfortunes of the characters would affect him to the point of shedding tears. It was at Uncle Jonathan's that I read my favorite novel--Ernest Maltravers" "In 1853 or 1854 we young people organized the 'Posten's Grove Temperance Watchmen's Club,' which only lasted about a year. It was followed by the 'Inland Literary Society,' also called 'The Athenaeum,' which met weekly at the school house. This was quite an ambitious organization. Its members read papers and held discussions on various topics."

News of the discovery of gold in California led Francis Parker and his son Francis Jackson to join the rush across the Plains in 1849. In the spring of that year they set out for the diggings with an ox team,

following the Santa Fe Trail. Celinda Parker's recollections of her father's peregrinations at this period are related by her son Claude W. Dutton in his contribution to "Parker In America." She says he returned about 1852 aboard a sailing vessel which consumed six months in rounding Cape Horn and reaching New Orleans after touching at Cuba. From New Orleans he took a steamboat up the Mississippi River to Davenport.

Again stirred by the discovery of gold on Cherry Creek, in Colorado Territory, in 1859, and with no other companion than his daughter Rhoda, he drove almost a thousand miles across the plains in a covered wagon to the Rocky Mountains just as Denver was taking form as a future city. She was married there in 1860 to Edward L. Gallatin, a native of St. Louis, who soon amassed a small fortune as an early manufacturer of fine western saddles, which were in great demand. She died there in or about 1915 in the imposing house in Logan Avnue near Broadway in which she had lived more than half a century. It was from Denver that her father, then past three score years and ten, set out in 1860 to prospect for gold in the high Rockies. Writing from somewhere near the source of the Arkansaw River, in South Park, in Colorado, on August 7, to his daughter Elizabeth, then the wife of Benjamin F. Gue, living near Big Rock, in Iowa, he said:

"I here took my horse and with four other men crost over the snowy range to the Blue [River]. Some places the snow was three feet deep. I saw clover in blossom and other flowers within three feet of the snow. The Blue is a stream that discharges itself into the Pasiffict Ocean. I made my way back to Tarryall Diggings and from there we came on to this place which is about two hundred miles from Denver, and on the snowy range. I do not think there was less than three thousand people here, and there was no chance to get a claim without paying a high price for it, so myself and four other men took our horses and went prospecting. We passed over two snowy ranges to the west and were on the highest range of the Rocky Mountains. I will tell you why I think so. We followed up the Arkansaw till it disappeared; that is when it got above the snowy range. The Plat takes its rise from this quarter running east. The Blue runs north and west till it mingles with the Green River. These [several words here illegible] makes the Colorado, and on the south starts out the Rio Grande which runs down through Texas and makes the dividing line in part between Texas and Mexico. We had to back down from this last mentioned. We could get no further and

reluctantly took the back track and passed over a snowy range to the south which found us on the Rio Grande. We were out in a severe snowstorm on the 5th of July. We saw in many places where if the horses had made a misstep, horse, rider and all would have gone to their long home, but we all arrived home safe and sound. We are now fixing our wagon and I leave tomorrow morning for New Mexico. We are going into the neighborhood of Fort Goslin, and if any of you should see fit to write to us, direct your letters to Fort Goslin by way of Independence. We are going amongst some of the most hostile Indians in the world."

The next letter received from him by any member of the family was addressed to his daughters Celinda Parker Dutton and Laura Parker Baker, and was dated Pine Altos Gold Mines, Arizona Territory, June 4, 1861. In it he said:

"We are surrounded here with the most barbarous tribe of Indians on the continent, the Apaches. It is but a few days ago they caught eleven men, hung them up by the heels, built a fire under them and burnt them to death. There is but a few days passes but what some one is murdered. No one dares venture far from the town alone and none dares leave unless they go in large gangs. The greatest danger is between here and the fort, which is twelve miles, although there is danger for one hundred miles. I shall leave soon as I can get away in safety.

"I work hard and live poor. The reason is because there is not much here; no vegetables and no fruit and not very often meat. There is plenty of flour, whiskey, rum and brandy. No coffee, no tea, no sugar. I never was so poor in flesh. I was weighed last Sunday; my heft one hundred and seventeen. It is not to be wondered at that I am so low in flesh. I work hard, live poor, travel two miles every morning down hill to my work and up hill back again at night. The travel is worse than the day's work. I have twenty yards down Bear Creek to work out if the water holds, and then I have two hundred and fifty yards in about half a mile of this place that will yield from five to ten cents a bucket, but there is no water on it. I don't think there will be this season. There has not been four days rain here for five months. The water is pretty much dried up, hardly water enough for house use. A most all the miners have left on account of the water.

"There has been a company of soldiers stationed here awhile, but they have left. There has been a dreadful set of inhabitants here; outlaws from California and other places. They have mostly left and gone to join the Southern army. The pistol and the bowie knife is the law, although they have always treated me with respect.

"I have an excellent gold quartz lead that is very rich--eight hundred yards that I bought and have it on record, and also a silver mine that is called very rich, but I shall have to leave them all on account of the Indians. If it were not for them I would stay another year. We do not know but a very little what is going on in the States. I get no papers since the Overland mail stopped. I don't request you to write, for there is no knowing where I shall be. In one month from now I want you to lay a fine plate on and some good butter. It has got to be dark and I must stop writing."

Francis Parker returned to Big Rock as anticipated, but the lure of the gold regions was in his blood, and in or before 1864 he started for the mountains again, this time on horseback and alone. He was in his seventy-seventh year, yet he now made the longest journey of all, going first to Virginia City, in Montana Territory, then to the wild country of the Blackfeet Indians where the Jefferson, Madison and Gallatin rivers come together to make the great Missouri. But let him tell the story in the last letter ever received from him. It was written June 18, 1865, at Prescott, Arizona Territory, and addressed to his youngest daughter Laura and her husband, Henry Baker.

"I will first inform you that I had a very good journey to Virginia City. Found nothing there to induce a new comer to stop long. I went from there to the Yellow Stone, one hundred and fifty miles all alone. Had three bad streams to cross, Jefferson, Madison, Gallatin Fork and the Yellow Stone, and this journey was something like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. Returned to Virginia City. Went to Ram's Horn. Not satisfied I returned about the first of September for Arizona by way of Salt Lake, which is four hundred miles from Virginia City. Moved slowly on towards the Colorado, followed the Mormon settlements, which is about four hundred miles south of Salt Lake City and about six hundred miles to where I struck the Colorado River, and Prescott is one hundred and fifty miles from the River.

"I spent the winter on the river and a good part of the time among the Mohavey Indians, and this is the same tribe and place where the

Oatman girls were and where the little girl was [illegible]. Boats run one hundred and fifty miles above this place. There is a fort here, late Fort Mojahavey. No cold weather on the river. Very warm all through the winter. There is also a fort in this place, late Fort Whipple. The garrison lives here. This is the capital of the Territory. Very warm days and very cold nights. I sleep under as many clothes as I do in the states in winter.

"The Apachey Indians is very troublesome here. No one ventures half a mile from the camp alone, and always armed, and when at work some one stands guard. There has been a number of fights with the Indians in this quarter since I have been here. They have taken a good horse from me. There is a mail due once a week, but it is very often taken by the Indians. If they get in at all it is with a heavy guard of soldiers. They often get whipped, with mail taken, everything belonging to them destroyed, mules run off and [illegible]. All kinds of provisions are very high. Butter one dollar and twenty-five cents per pound; pork sixty cents; sugar fifty cents; coffee one dollar; powder two dollars per pound. I expect things would be cheaper if they could get in the [wagon?] trains. They are very often taken by the Indians."

"Your affectionate father until Death,  
FRANCIS PARKER."

From this long journey, on which he traversed the hunting grounds of the Ogalalla Sioux, the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Pawnees, Blackfeet and other warlike Indians, Francis Parker never returned. Nor is it certainly known just what happened to him. His daughter Rhoda wrote to me from Denver when she was eighty-three years old and feeble of body and brain that he was killed at the Pinos Alta mines in the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico. But the early family tradition back in Iowa was that he had been shot by Apaches or by road agents on the Santa Fe Trail about forty miles east of Albuquerque as he rode alone and homeward bound. A newspaper containing an account of the murder was said to have come to his son Jackson Parker at Big Rock in the autumn of 1865. Claude Dutton had the records of the War Department at Washington searched for a possible record of the affair, and much later I sent a copy of his last letter to friends in Prescott and Santa Fe who searched the newspapers of the period, and the letter was finally broadcast over the radio; but without any success in reaching contemporary evidence as to what had happened in 1865.

The death of his wife, Rhoda Chaplin, in 1846, had left Francis Parker a widower at the age of fifty-eight with five unmarried daughters in his household, the youngest of whom was nine years old, and the oldest only twenty-two. But the girls had an older married sister and a married brother living in the little settlement on Rock Creek, in Scott County, and before the death of the father occurred all of the girls had husbands and homes of their own. Right here it is worthy of note that one of them lived to be ninety-seven; another ninety-three, while the six reached an average age of eighty-two, and five an average of eighty-seven. Probably it was the presence of so many of his children in one community to look after each other that led the father to spend so much time in his later years searching the Rocky Mountains for the bonanza he never found.