



Grandma Gatewood

Ohio's Legendary Hiker

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An excerpt from:
Grandma Gatewood: Ohio's Legendary Hiker

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In 1959, she decided to hike behind a wagon train traveling between Independence, Missouri to Portland, Oregon. Her plan was to walk along the 2,000-mile Oregon Trail to honor the Oregon Centennial. By the time she got to Missouri, though, she found out that the wagon train had left without her.

Emma had a couple of choices. She could turn around and go home – but, she wasn't much of a quitter. Or, she could start hiking, and that's what she did – leaving Independence, Missouri on May 4.

It was often hot and windy, so she covered her mouth to make it easier to keep breathing AND to make it more difficult for those skunks with cameras – her inelegant name for photographers – to take her picture! She hated how people always wanted her to stop and pose for pictures. If she stopped for all of them, she declared, she'd never get to Portland. When some of them got rude with her about taking a photo, she got rude right back.

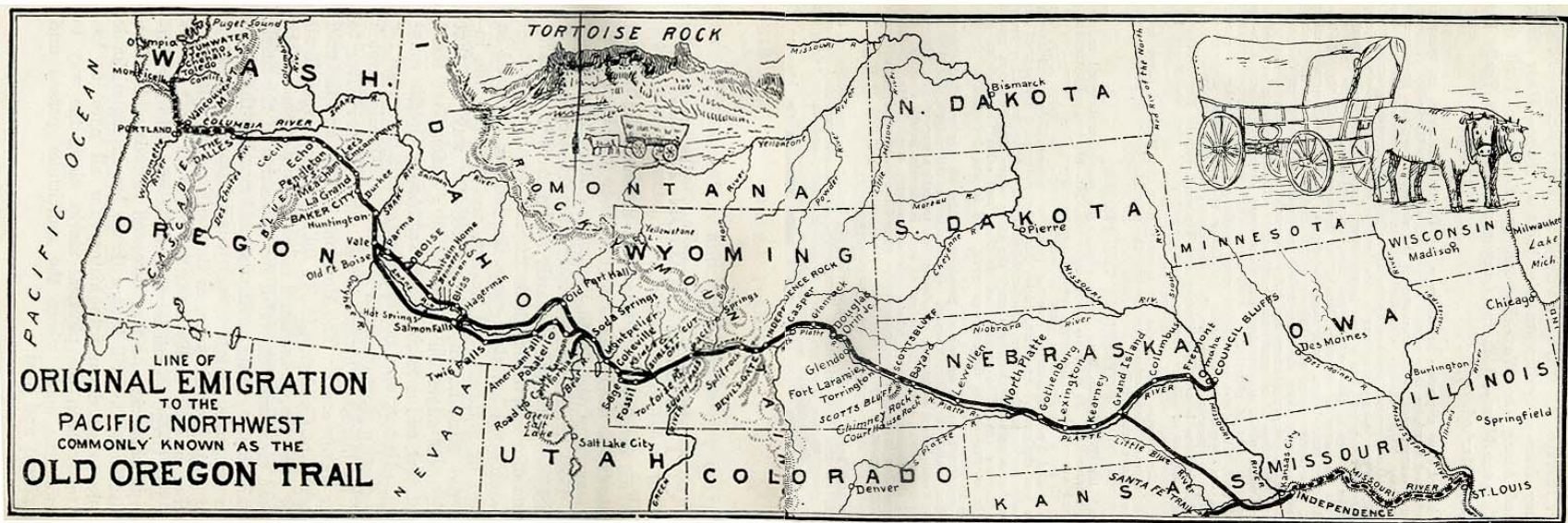
When the hike was almost over, the deputy sheriff of the region offered to carry her umbrella for the rest of the hike, but she told him not on his life because she needed it to defend herself from “commoners with cameras.” Finally, after hiking the whole 2,000 miles, she found out that she'd reached the end, in Portland on August 7, before the wagon train! Emma had averaged about 22 miles per day – and it was awfully tempting to head back to cheer the wagon train on. Ends up that she finished the hike a full week before the wagon train crossed the finish line!

By this time, she was really tired of the newspaper reporters and photographers following her around, tired of all the fuss that goes along with being a celebrity. One of them actually asked her if this hike was a publicity stunt for money! “Phooney on you” was about the nicest thing she could think of to say to a reporter like that.

She did get into a bit of trouble with a photographer named Robert Hall. She was weary of walking on the trail, so she sat down to rest. Who shows up right on the trail? This reporter and a radio man! They talked to Emma for a bit, which was fine with her, but then one of them aimed his camera at her. She finally had enough. She hit him on the forehead with

her blue umbrella. Bob's forehead bled and she just sat there and cried. It took someone offering her a hamburger and a glass of cold water for her to calm down. Later Bob was quoted as saying, "She hits like a mule."

People apparently forgave her, though, because Governor Hatfield made her an ambassador-at-large of the Oregon Centennial Celebration and she got the keys to the cities of Portland, Medford and Seaside. In her honor, any woman, aged 65 or older, who attended Oregon Centennial festivities got in for free. As for her blue umbrella (which cost \$1.50!) – it became a permanent exhibit at the Portland Historical Museum.



Oregon Trail Map from 1907; Public Domain Image, Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon_Trail



This story is an excerpt of Eden Valley's e-book, [Grandma Gatewood: Ohio's Legendary Hiker](#). Emma's story is the topic of Eden Valley's newest project which includes a storytelling program, one act play and a PBS Documentary created with FilmAffects and WGTE/PBS. Find complete information Emma and her accomplishments and this project at <http://edenvalleyenterprises.org/progdesc/gatewood/gtwdinf.htm> and view our documentary trailer at <http://tinyurl.com/gatewoodtrl3> To purchase a complete copy of the book, visit our website at: <http://edenvalleyenterprises.org/booksoh.html#grandma>

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