

Perseverance: A Woman's Journey West

Inspired by a pioneer woman's journal, *Perseverance* presents an interpretation of 1840s homesteading life and an Oregon Trail journey. Keturah Belknap (1820-1913) documented her experiences in detail, bringing to life a female perspective of westward migration.

Artist Heide Presse came across a copy of Belknap's journal and envisioned a series of paintings and drawings. Presse's decade-long research project culminates with this exhibition presenting daily life—along with trials and triumphs—on the frontier. The first section chronicles Belknap's early years of marriage and farm life in Iowa, and then the focus turns to the 2,000-mile wagon train journey to Oregon.

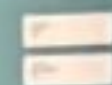
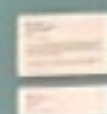
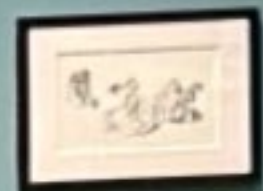
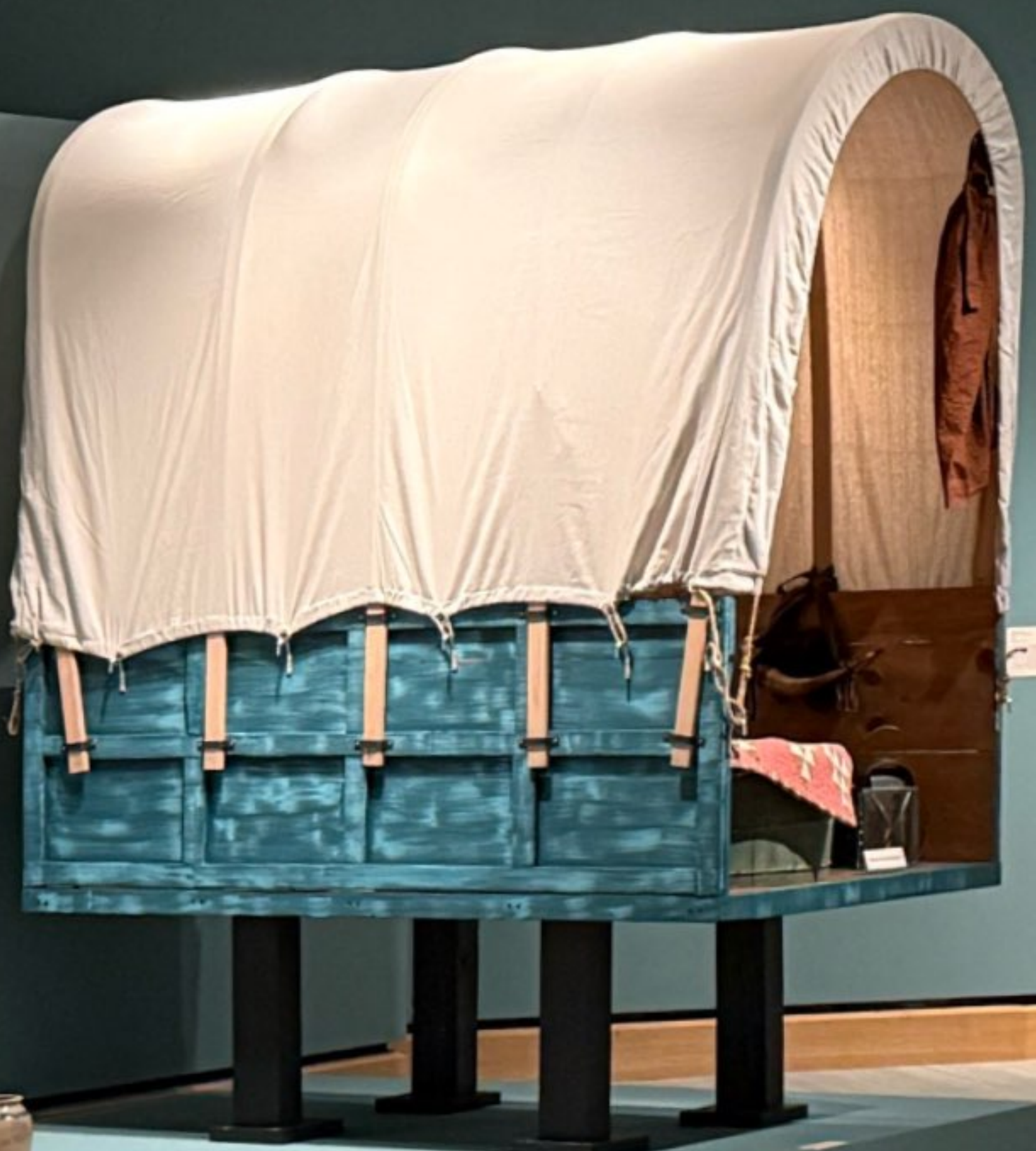
In addition to presenting Presse's artistic talent, *Perseverance* showcases her thorough research of this period in history. She traveled around the country to living history museums and followed some of the original Oregon Trail. She learned to sew historically accurate quilts and clothing, and collected artifacts—some of which accompany the paintings here.

Perseverance also serves as a tribute to the determination and resilience of pioneer women like Belknap. The writings and art offer a glimpse of personal experience from almost 200 years ago—a slower pace and simpler time.



Perseverance is a painting by Heide Presse, depicting a scene from the Oregon Trail. The painting is part of a series of works that tell the story of Keturah Belknap's journey westward.

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Belknap Family Journey 1840–1848



0 100 200 300 Miles
0 300 Kilometers

..... Belknap Family Journey
- - - - - Belknap Route to Oregon Trail
- - - - - Oregon Trail

Homestead Life in Iowa



Helde Premr
 American, born 1958
field work
breaking sod
teamwork
honing
harvesting
 2013
 Graphite on paper

Spring 1848...we hired a man with a grain team to break the sod. The man put into each corn for sods. The breaking team was five yoke of oxen with a man to hold the plough and a goaded boy with a long whip to drive the oxen.

—Keturah DeLap



Heide Press
Amherst, Maine 1958
Unimpressed Visitor
2018
Old man from

For two years, Katsushige and George Bellup worked to build a home here on their town property where they could sit and enjoy home with his parents and siblings.

November 1842. Everything is about done up and we have moved to our new home. Have not got much to be home with, but it is real nice to have things all my own way. —Clara sat in my room all of a variety and then she began my night. —Our house is right at the crossroads, and they say it is such a handy place to take it right on the road going any way as I try to keep a little something prepared.

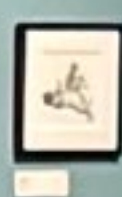
—Katsushige Bellup



EXIT



Historical photograph of a group of people.



April 12th - Bright & Early

April 12 - All work bright and early
Breakfast is soon over. My work is
all done up, lunch prepared and
all in the proper place for noon.
Now it is Monday morning, April 13th.
The school again. The next point is
the Mission. After which we will
go to a school. Have passed over
day for a while. Have had fine weather,
good roads, and all have been well.
We have three good milk cows. We
milk them at night and strain the
milk in little buckets, pour them up
and set them on the ground under
the wagon, and in the morning
take off the nice thick cream and
put it in the churn. I save the
strappings from each cow in the
morning and put it in the churn
also. After milking all day, I have
a new roll of butter - as long as
we have plenty of grass and water.
- Return 13.



Drying Out



Platte River Crossing



Washed and Ironed



Letter! - Just received



Washed and Ironed



Washed and Ironed



Washed and Ironed



Washed and Ironed



“When I paint historical pieces,
I am most interested in how people
lived their daily lives. Reading the
journals of those who lived before
us fuels my imagination, and I strive
to be authentic in their portrayal.”

-Heide Presse, artist



Heide Presse
American, born 1958
Piggy Back
2023
Graphite on paper



Heide Presse
American, born 1958
Her Heart
2019
Graphite on paper



Life After the Trail



Keturah Belknap (center, age 80) with family in 1900. Image courtesy of Jim Tompkins

From later manuscripts written by her family, we know the Belknap family settled in Oregon in the winter of 1848. The following year, George Belknap and other men in the area ventured south to California seeking gold. They found enough success that they purchased animals and equipment for their farms back in Oregon.

George and Keturah took up the U.S. government offer of 640 acres, an exclusive opportunity for married white couples as part of the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850. Stipulated in the act was that half of that land was in the wife's name, so Keturah could pass land to her family. As in Iowa, they started a Methodist church, gathering in the settlement's log schoolhouse.

The Belknaps had several more children, and in 1879 moved near Spokane, Washington. On her 90th birthday in 1910, an Iowa newspaper called her "the oldest pioneer woman in the Northwest." Keturah lived to be 93 years old.