

10 → RICHMOND PALLADIUM April 3, 1850

A Letter from California.

Sacramento City, Jan. 17th, 1850.

I see by your paper that you have had a letter from Mr. Stidham giving some account of the country &c. We were about four months on our journey from Independence to the "gold diggings." On the 1st day of Sept. we arrived at Steep Hollow on Bear River, where we saw the first gold washed out of the California sand. The Company from Wayne County continued to travel together only about 8 or 10 miles from this Steep Hollow. The Centreville Company now left for the Yuba River, where we remained until the latter part of October. We were all sick on the Yuba, and also a great many others,

I do not suppose it necessary for me to say much about our trip across the plains, as I suppose you have seen enough of such discriptions. While travelling from Independence to the Platt and up that river we suffered from cold winds and rains, thunder storms &c. I have never seen any such storms of rain, thunder, lightning and wind altogether, in the States, as we here meet with every day or two. These excessive rains rendered the roads in many places very heavy. Where the road run along the bank of Platt river it was generally good, being very sandy. But there were quick-sands and places where we had to leave the river, that were nearly impassible for our wagons and teams. After we passed Fort Laramie we had no rain, but dry, hot weather all the time during the day. The nights were cold enough to produce frost and sometimes ice - but the day was hot enough to roast you; and we worked very hard all day in getting our wagons with their loads across the river. We had intended celebrating the 4th at the South Pass, but came there too soon, & could not think of stopping to wait for it, but travelled on. The trip across the plains to the South Pass, except the occasional muddy roads, and a few streams where the banks are very steep, is not an extremely difficult task to accomplish. No great distance after we passed the South Pass, we come to what is called Sublitt's cut off, where we travelled over fifty miles without water. Part of this is a beautiful road, but some of it again is very rough and hilly. This brings us to Green river, or the Colorado of the Gulf. From this we have to pass over some high mountains, to Bear river. Here we have a beautiful valley producing luxuriant grass - enough to supply all the animals that will pass this way, and to spare. If the valley was 3000 or 4000 feet lower, it would be fine for corn, melons, sweet-potatoes, &c.- But it is high up in a frosty region. In this valley and along near the river, we find the Soda Springs and the Beer springs, often described by other Adventurers. Here also the "Steamboat spring" which I consider much the greatest curiosity of them all. The water boils up through an aperture in the rock, several feet above the surface, for a few minutes and then quietly subsides within the rock for about the same length of time, and then returns again, and so keeps on AD INFINITUM. In this vicinity we saw several old craters. A few miles below this we leave Bear river and turn to the right on the Fort Hall road. For several miles along here we travelled among volcanic remains, of a great variety of appearances. The road is pretty good now to Fort Hall, except in the immediate vicinity of the Fort, where it is rather marshy. The Fort is situated on the bank of Snake river, in an extensive level plain, or it is rather a

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natural meadow covered with a fine growth of grass. This place is under the charge and command of an old English gentleman, Capt. Grant. He is a very hospitable old fellow, but as rough as a grizzly bear. He treated us with much more kindness and attention than they did at either of the other Forts we passed. He has an Indian wife. A number of Snake Indians were encamped here. We traveled down Snake river some fifty miles. Here we leave the river and turn to the left over the high ridge of mountains between Snake and Humbolt views. When our encampments for the night were near the river bank we were nearly devoured by mosquitoes, of the most savage and blood-thirsty character. Probably their natures may partake somewhat of the character of their food, which is derived almost solely from the blood of the wild beast, and the savage red men of the forest.

The road between these two views is rough and mountainous in many places. I do not recollect the distance across to the Humbolt, but we arrived in the valley of the river on the 27th of July. Where we first came into it, it is a beautiful valley of rich soil and clothed with a luxuriant growth of grass, of different varieties, and among which I found clover and herd grass. We travelled down this river for a long distance and every day it became more and more tiresome and disagreeable. In some places we would find excellent grass, others again it was a barren waste. During the day, we were nearly suffocated with dust, and roasted with the heat of the sun. At night we frequently had some frost, and sometimes ice. We had no water to drink but the river water, which, during the day was quite warm, and constantly getting worse as we travelled down the river. When we got within about 20 miles of the termination of the river - where it sinks, we had to take enough of water to serve us for 25 miles, as below this the water is saline and very unpleasant. Here we have also to halt long enough to cut and make hay to do our teams for the next 75 miles, which is a perfect desert. The grass in this place was only discovered about two weeks before we came along. There appears to be an inexhaustible supply here for all the animals that may pass this way. There are also extensive swamps here.- It is about six miles from the main road. The surface of the earth here in many places is composed almost entirely of vegetable matter, which was on fire in a number of places, and the surface burned off, in others to the depth of several inches.- There were large crevices or cracks in some places extending to the depth of several feet, and it was of such a fragile nature as to let the men and animals break through two or three feet in depth. On this extensive grass field we found 200 wagons encamped, making preparations to cross the desert. About 20 miles further down, the river spreads over a considerable extent of surface and disappears. About 5 miles from here we came to the Sulphur springs, which are located in a small valley or low place near the road, and consist of some half dozen holes dug in the ground to the depth of 4 or 5 feet and surrounded on all sides by horses, mules and oxen, both alive and dead, so you may readily conclude that it was not very clean or enticing; but we had to use it. And with all other things it was pretty strong of sulphur. If the springs were enclosed and properly taken care of, the water would be pretty good. From here we had 25 miles to the hot springs. Here are a number of springs located on an inclined plain, which extends back to the mountains. There is a large reservoir of hot water. The temperature, if I remember right is about 160 degrees Fa'h't. We sent a detachment of men

forward in the afternoon to cool water for our animals. The greater number of our teams arrived there about midnight. The animals drank the water with avidity. It is not very unpleasant to the taste when it is cold, but it produced severe pains in the majority of our men. It answered a very good purpose for making coffee, which was the manner that we generally used it. There were remains of much destroyed property and dead animals here, that rendered the place very unpleasant. From here we had about 25 miles to Salmon Trout river where we arrived the next night about 12 o'clock. The last 7 or 8 miles of the road is very heavy, being very heavy, being very sandy.

It was a great relief to wearied human nature, to be again where we could look upon pure, cool and running water, and green trees and grass. This is a beautiful stream of water. From here we traveled up this river about 30 miles, crossing it about 27 or 28 times, in that distance. Some of the crossings were very difficult. This brought us to the pine timber, which continues until we pass entirely over the Sierra Nevada mountains. These mountains are mountains in good earnest, and very difficult to pass over, being very steep in ascent and descent and many places so near perpendicular and so rocky that we were compelled to take the teams from the wagons and let them down by ropes. It was the practice in some places to cut down trees and fasten them behind the wagon, top foremost, then take off all the team but those to the tongue and go down the mountain in that manner. I saw hundreds of acres of the common garden parsley on this side of the summit of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Also the angelica and some others of our garden vegetables. This brings us to the gold region.

The valley of Humbolt river, which is so highly spoken of by Col. Fremont is entirely destitute of timber, except small willows that grow in some places along the immediate bank of the river, which serve for fuel for the emigrants, but there is not a solitary tree the whole length of the river as far as we traveled, which was from near its source to its termination.

The glowing descriptions of this country given by Fremont and Bryant, will not apply to any part that I have seen, nor do I believe it will apply to any part of it. The Sacramento valley is much the most desirable part of California that I have seen. It is 600 or 700 miles in length and about 100 miles in width, extending from the Sierra to the coast range of mountains. In the spring and early part of the summer it is, no doubt, a delightful place when covered with a luxuriant growth of grass, and large herds of wild cattle, elf, deer, &c., feeding on it. But in the latter part of the summer and fall, it is dried up by the sun, and the absence of rain for several months in succession. In the winter or rainy season much of it is under water. At this time much of the valley is covered with water. On the 9th instant the water broke over the banks of the American and Sacramento rivers and completely inundated out town. The water has been from 6 to 10 feet deep in the streets and about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep in our house. Boats are running all over the city. A great majority of the houses are but one story high, and the inhabitants of all these had to retreat on board the shipping in the river, to Sutter's Fort, or to Squatter's Island, which is a small spot of dry ground on the east of the city.- There has been a great destruction of horses, mules and oxen by drowning, and of merchandize by floating off, and otherwise injured by the water. About 20 of us have been close prisoners for near two weeks in an upper room, where we have

to do our cooking, eating, sleeping and exercising. We have to spend our time in eating, to which some add drinking, sleeping, and some in singing, some in playing cards, checkers, &c., some telling yarns, and a few in reading, but our stock of reading matter was very short until we received your papers, which came at a very fortunate time. I have not been out in the city but once since the flood. I then took a short trip through the city in our boat. (Almost every house has a boat moored at the door.) I find a number of houses have been floated from their foundations, and among these is the Methodist church. It is a frame house of something like 40 by 30 feet. I suppose the reason was the want of ballast.

This city is supposed to contain about 10,000 inhabitants, many of which are transient, being here only for the winter, and of nearly all the nations of the earth, and of every grade of character. Society is not very refined, which I attribute in part to the almost entire absence of females. There are a few ladies here and but few, and very few children. I have not had the pleasure of speaking to a lady for near 3 months. There are a great many gamblers here, who do a large business. They keep it up day and night, and Sundays, skinning a great many of the miners who are weak enough to be taken in by them, out of all their earnings for the season, in one night, leaving them minus of all means of living for the winter. Drinking and swearing is more universal than any place I have ever seen.

There is a considerable amount of sickness here this winter. The diseases that are most proverbial are diarrhoea, pneumonia and typhoid fever. The deaths are said to average near 20 per day. If you could have taken a walk around the suburbs of our city before the flood, and seen the amount of filth, dead animals &c., and seen the manner in which many of the inhabitants are exposed in the frail shanties and huts, and the want of attention that the sick have to endure; you would not be surprised at the number of deaths. The Odd Fellows and Masons have united and established a hospital at Sutter's Fort, to take care of the needy brethren of each order, that may be sick, and to afford accommodations to others that are able to pay, at a reasonable compensation, say about \$10 per day. There is supposed to be 3000 graves between Independence and the Sierra Nevada mountains.

I am greatly disappointed in the country, but not in the gold. That is no humbug. It is scattered all over the land, that is, along the streams, and in ravines among the mountains. There is plenty here, but everyone that is here will not get rich. It requires untiring industry and hard labor to obtain it. Some fortunate ones obtain it in large amounts in a short time, but such cases are rare. Much the larger number will not average over \$8 or \$10 per day.- About one ounce per day may be considered successful mining.

Prices are not much different now from what they were when Mr. Stidham wrote. Flour is 18 to 20 dollars per 100 weight. Pork about 40 dollars per barrel. Lard 75 cents. Butter \$1.25 to \$1.50. Potatoes from 20 to 40 cents per lb. Onions \$1.25 to \$1.50 per lb.

Lumber is now worth about \$450 per 1000 feet.- it sold some two months since in small quantities at \$1100 per 1000 ft. Rents are extravagantly high. A house that would rent in your city at 800 or a 1000 a year, would rent here for \$20,000. Board is from 20 to 30 dollars per week. There is one house here, the "Sutter

House," kept by a darkie that charges 30 dollars per week for board, and 12 dollars per week for lodging. The ships have charged those that took shelter on board during the flood 35 dollars per week. The object of nearly everyone here, is to make money and he generally takes the advantage of all circumstances that present themselves.

A great majority of the emigrants to this country, labor under a great mistake with regard to the propriety or necessity of bringing capital to this country. A great many were under the impression that it would be entirely useless here. This is a great mistake. There is no place that I have any knowledge of where money can be so profitably invested as here.- The common interest on loans here, is 10 per cent per month, or 120 per cent per annum. Many men have made large fortunes here by trading, particularly in real estate. This coming season will not be as good as last, but will yet be profitable. This place has grown up, as it were, by magic. It is not one year old yet from its early infancy, and as I said before contains near 10,000 inhabitants, some think more. I have no doubt that next December will find the number doubled. This place and San Francisco, have not a parallel in rapidity of growth, in the history of this or any other country. San Francisco is even now more rapidly advancing than this place. It possesses some natural advantages over this, from its proximity to Pacific, which gives the advantage in lumber being cheaper there than here. It is the place where all the emigrants across the Isthmus or around the Horn first land, and from there scatter all over the country. We are near the centre of the mining region, and if we should have a Mint established in this country, I think this much the most eligible place for its location.

JOHN FRICHET.