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DR. SAMUEL CRAIG PLUMMER
139 West Van Buren Street
Chicago

~~1848~~ MUJZ

See m. j. mottoe
Platte River Real Nantion
Entry # 930

June 9, 1938

Dr. Irving S. Cutter, Dean,
Northwestern University Medical School,
301 E. Chicago Ave.,
Chicago.

Herewith excerpts of letters written by my father, Samuel C. Plummer, in 1850, which we spoke of last evening. You thought the California Historical Society might like to have them.

I have headed them "letters of S.C.P.I". There is a series of four by the name of Samuel Craig Plummer, my father, the writer of these letters, born 1821, died 1900, myself, S.C.P.II, my son, S.C.P.III, and my grandson, S.C.P.IV.

I find no later records of his stay in California, but remember what he told me of the result. Four old acquaintances from Pennsylvania, his native state, fearing they would not survive to see their homes again, offered him \$250.00 each if he took them back alive. He got them all back to Pennsylvania via the Isthmus of Panama and they all paid him. This one thou. and dollars represented his entire financial return for his arduous experiences.

The ripe old age which he attained shows that he suffered no permanent impairment of his health.

Yours truly,

S. C. Plummer II

P.S. If you will return this written draft and also send me a typewritten copy, I shall be grateful. The original letters are hard to decipher.
S.C.P.

Note: Started by wagon from Muscatine, Iowa, March 16, 1850, on trip overland to California.

Dear Wife:

Kanesville, Apr. 30, 1850
(Stamped by Post Office, Kane, Iowa)

We arrived in this town on last Tuesday all well and in good spirits having been on the road over three weeks, eight and one-half days of which time we laid over waiting for Herrick and King to come up with us but they did not overtake us until we got here.My health has been very good since I left. I can eat more at one meal now than I used to when at home in three and am hungry all the time. I have walked more than two thirds of the way every day since I started and am as tough as a pine knot, my weight being now 154 pounds, four pounds more than I ever weighed before. To sum up, I am in good spirits, good health and good condition with a good prospect ahead.

We will be here about one week longer, then we will leave civilization. It is only four miles from here across Missouri river, we are then in the land of Indians. We have purchased another horse and wagon and now have a four horse team. Our four horse team we will load with our provisions and clothing, the two horse team with feed.

This town is the Mormon headquarters, the citizens of the town and country being all Mormons. They are kind and seem to try to do everything to make the emigrants at home among them. More than one half said against and about the Mormons is not true; a majority of them are intelligent people and well educated; they are neat, plain, cleanly people. They all intend going to the valley of the Great Salt Lake as soon as they can, in a year or two at farthest. They have taken up their abode here on government land and are cultivating it merely for present purposes.

I have not slept but one night in a house for over two weeks and that night gave me a cold; would not have staid in that night but was called to see a Californian who came here ahead of us and was very low with lung fever. I

did all I could for him but he died the next day.

The Californians here are as intelligent a set of men as I ever saw, all appearing to be above mediocrity.

We have not seen but one Indian yet, they don't come over very much. We would have left this place tomorrow for the plains but last night it snowed to the depth of two inches which will put the grass back, so that we may stay here for a week yet. This town is nine miles above Council Bluffs.

The cholera is among the emigrants at the points below us on the river but we do not expect it here; this is a healthy place.

State of Iowa opposite the Mormon "Winter Quarters" in Nebrisk (sic) Territory

April 21st, 1850

Dear Wife:

We have made our start from civilization and traveled twelve miles up the Missouri River from Kanessville to what is called the upper ferry on the river. Tomorrow we will commence crossing and by Tuesday evening we will all be over. Wednesday we will take up our line of march. Our company will number near 100 men and about 150 horses and say 40 wagons. We have some members from Wisconsin, some from Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, New York, and Pennsylvania. The members of the company are all men of the upper class and a more noble whole souled set of fellows I never saw, all ready to do their best to get along well. We have not yet had an organization but will have this afternoon at which time our officers will be elected. I am well and in good spirits.

I have just been to another tent to see a sick Californian; his sickness is from exposure but not dangerous. I know of but one death among those who arrived at the Bluffs and two on the road from accidents with firearms. The country here abounds in game of all kinds.

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We will spend the fourth of July in Sacramento City if nothing prevents.

The weather has been cold and stormy until within the last two days. Today we have warm growing showers and have reason to think the grass will grow soon. We will carry our feed for 30 or 40 days so we run no risk in starting before the grass is up.

Fort Laramie, May 20, 1850.

Dear Wife:

I have just crossed the Platte river. We started from "Winter Quarters" on the 25th of April and have laid over $4\frac{1}{2}$ days since we left. Our team has stood it well and except one horse are in good condition although they have had to haul a heavy load. We have still enough corn to last us 12 or 15 days. The spring has been very backward but has now fairly opened and the days are hot enough to roast potatoes in the sun. The grass, however, is still short but a few good showers will fetch it forward. We have the best roads to travel on that I ever saw. I don't think 534 miles of as good road can be found in the U. S. We have seen buffalo by the thousand and lots of every other kind of game. We have had buffalo meat, antelope and venison until we have got tired of it.

Some of the country we passed through was very rich land and some of it poor. The surface of the poor land is covered with alkali and the water in some so strongly impregnated with it that it made the horses sick.

We met a party of Sioux Indians last Sunday evening painted and rigged out for war. They rode to our camp in military order making the best display I ever saw. The Sioux Indians are a noble looking race. They wanted some provisions and powder which we traded to them for mocasons and robes. They were on their way to fight the Omahas and Pawnees. We have since met several parties of them bound for the seat of war.

For the last three days we have been passing by bluffs romantic beyond description. The first we came to was what is called "ancient bluff ruins" resembling castles, observatories and fortifications. The next place of note is the chimney rock; the base is a hill about 200 feet high, perfectly round and on the top one rock about 40 feet high and 25 feet in diameter looking as though

nature had erected a monument on purpose to surpass the efforts of man. The next is Scott's Bluffs resembling a huge fortress.

We are now in sight of Ft. Laramie, it is situated in the valley between the North fork of the Platte and the Laramie fork. The grounds of the fort are surrounded by a ditch and a wall enclosing several hundred acres of land. The fort and houses, some eight or ten in number, are surrounded by a wall of adobe or unburnt brick, the houses built of the same material except one frame house.

From here we will take the new road to the South Pass shunning the Black Hills. A dispatch bearer came in last night from Fort Hall and represents the road as being a great deal better than the Black Hills road. He says that a thousand horses died of starvation last winter and that all the soldiers have deserted and gone to the mines and the officers to Oregon.

My health is good and I am getting fat under the fatigues of the journey. Cothrin looks well and does well with the exception of an occasional streak of the blues which disease I am troubled with by times owing to my not having heard from you after leaving you at Muscatine.

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Placerville, Calif.

July 23, 1850

Dear Wife:

This town is two years old and contains a population of four thousand with a floating population of five or six thousand more. It is the first village we came to and it is a busy hurly burly little place. The ground that it is built upon has nearly all been dug over and a vast quantity of gold taken out. Mining is carried on now on all sides and pays the miner from \$8 to \$40 per day but at these rates it is but few that save anything. They are not satisfied with "well enough" but must "prospect" which is ruinous as all the expenses to which they are liable are at least sixteen times as much as they would be in the States.

I wrote you from Ft. Laramie and gave you a description of the journey

to that point. I will now begin there again and give a brief history of the balance of the route. From Ft. Laramie we followed the Platte River some 50 or 60 miles, then left it and crossed the black hills which required some 3 or 4 days traveling. We then struck the Platte again and followed it to what is known as the upper ferry, where we crossed and left the river. The part of the road we have been passing over is scarce of feed but we have found enough (being early) to feed our stock. From the upper ferry we passed over desert for near 40 miles until we reached the Sweet water at "Independence Rock". The waters on this part of the road are strongly alkaline, the ground where the waters have dried off covered with a white crust of alkali for miles on each side of the road, some places six or eight inches thick. We gathered some and used it to raise our "slap Jacks" and bread. The road from "Independence Rock" followed the Sweet water within a few miles of the South Pass. Some parts of this road we found grass abundant and good and other places we would travel for days finding hardly enough to keep our horses alive. I was much disappointed when we got to the pass; I had pictured up in my mind a narrow gap in the mountains with high rugged walls of rock on each side and difficult to get through with grand romantic mountain scenery of all sides but instead of that we would have passed the summit of the father of mountains and not known it had it not been for our Morman guide.

Our disappointment at the pass led us to believe that going to California was not half so difficult as some would make it nor were we undeceived for some time. We had no trouble in crossing Green River, Hams fork of Bear River or any of the rivers. The ascent of the mountains was not difficult but they were "some" to get down. We would lock all the wheels and then hold back with ropes; this however was only fun and we were in good heart. Along Bear River the grass was good and the road fine. After leaving Bear River we traveled several days over mountains and came to the great basin and the "Great Humbolt" (ought to be Humbug) or St. Mary's River which we followed for about three hundred miles. The first hundred miles the water was good, the feed abundant and roads good. That hundred miles passed and we began to get a glimpse of the posterior parts of the Elephant. From this he came rapidly in sight and we got a satisfactory view of him, tail and

trunk.

Before we got across the Sierra Nevada mountains, the last 200 miles on the Humbolt, we had to wade and swim to get feed for our stock in water that was so strong with alkali that it burned up our boots and took the skin off our feet and hands. Our horses and ourselves were compelled to drink this water the result of which was one half of the stock died from its effects. The rest as well as the men were so weak that they could scarcely get along. Then too the provisions began to fail; some had not a mouthful of anything to eat. Horses and mules were killed, then steaks jerked and hundreds lived on their meat for two or three hundred miles. I have known men travel four and five days without a mouthful of anything to eat, they could not go the horse meat. One poor fellow from Ohio drowned himself rather than kill his horse. His company cast lots and it fell on him to kill his horse for meat. He said "Gentlemen, I have not come to that yet nor can I do it," plunged into the Humbolt and never rose. We had plenty of provisions but put ourselves on short allowance and gave all the rest to the destitute. We found some on Carson River after we crossed the desert but not near enough to answer the demand. The Mormans have established a trading station 80 miles from the desert in Carson Valley where provisions can be obtained at the following rates: beef 60¢ to \$1.00 per pound, flour \$2.00 per pound, sugar \$2.00 per pound, rice \$3.00 per pound, potatoes \$1.50 per pound and other things in proportion. Even at these rates it is a Godsend that they are there, for the emigrants can trade them (if they have no money) their stock. I have seen a good but thin horse given for six pounds of flour. These are about the rates of trade with them; they will make an independent fortune this year.

We followed the Carson Valley to its head, then took a branch of the river through a canyon climbing over rocks from the size of a barrel to that of a "Martin House", the ascent steep. This got over we came to mud axle-tree deep and having got through it we came again to terra firma and congratulated ourselves that there could be nothing worse but we were disappointed for we had not traveled over ten miles until the road came square against an almost perpendicular

wall of rocks high as the clouds and covered with eternal snows. Now came the tug of war; there was no backing out. Our wagon was a light one and the load would not exceed 800 pounds. We started and by helping all we could got up the first pitch. The second was worse so we concluded it was best to unload and pack our luggage up the mountain, distance near a mile. This done our four horses and some 8 or 10 men succeeded in getting the wagon up. Surely we said to ourselves there can be nothing worse and we were right but we found another just as bad. Got over it worn out and our teams almost starved; no feed. Turned them loose and lay down on the cold ground. Started before daylight in hopes to find feed for our horses and about nine o'clock came to where the snow had melted long enough for the grass to begin to grow a little. Here we stopped long enough to get our meal and let the horses eat all the grass there was. Our horses were not satisfied with feed that day nor any day after until we got through; two of them died of starvation after we got through. "Tom Tight" died from eating too much clover in Carson Valley, so that we may say we got through with three out of six horses.

Now I will give you my opinion of any person who will cross the plains after this year. I say if I was sure that all the gold in California was piled up in a pile and I could have it, by coming across the plains after it, it would hardly be an inducement, so that the man who will cross the plains, make a nigger of himself after he gets here, working harder in the scorching rays of a California sun than he has ever worked at home and that for eight dollars (for this is the average yield) per day, paying two to four dollars of that for comfort and provisions counting expenses of outfit and getting home after which he has little or nothing left, I say the person who will come under those circumstances, and this is a true picture, is the greatest of all fools and ought to be sent to an insane hospital or have a guardian appointed to prevent him from squandering his property.

I have learned that I was a fool but I "don't cry after spilled milk" but will make the best I can of it and get home as soon as I can. I have opened an office in this town and think I will be able to do something here by my pro-

fession (physician). I can dig and attend to my professional duties and between the two I have an idea that I can make something. So far I have paid my board which is \$18. per week.

Placerville, Aug. 8, 1850

Dear Friends:

My health has been good and I have been doing a tolerable fair business. I have taken in two partners, one a Dr. McDill of Illinois, the other a man by the name of Sloan, by trade a baker. We are going to establish a hospital, grocery, eating house and bakery all which are good business and can be carried on upon very small means. We hope to make a pile soon and return home.

Our business has averaged from forty to eighty dollars a day. Nearly all the emigrants are taken sick shortly after their arrival; dysentery, diarrhoea and scurvy are the prevalent diseases. The dysentery is very hard to manage. Some of our patients have been reduced low but all so far have recovered. We have no right to expect so good luck in all cases.

Thousands upon thousands of immigrants are daily arriving in this town; the country is full to overflowing. The average yield of the mines is eight dollars per day. Some however are extra fortunate and make even thousands in a day; these are rare cases. Many of those arriving are disappointed in their expectations. Those who are able go home, some commit suicide and the balance drown their sorrows in King Alcohol, soul destroying though. Fancy young would-be gentlemen have no business in this country, nor mother's pets nor persons who are too lazy at home. It is the hard fisted, iron framed laboring man who makes money in California by mining. There are a few of the smartest of the professionals who are doing well, but for every one of them there are twenty-five doing nothing.

This town Placerville (formerly called Hangtown) is at the foot of the mountains in what is called a cool part of the country (the thermometer is now standing at 104°). It is fifty miles from here to Sacramento City. We are in the midst of the best dry diggins in California which makes it one of the best points for my business. It does not cost near as much to live here as it did a year ago.

Potatoes sell at 20 to 25 cents per pound, tomatoes 30 cents, rice 50 cents, sugar 50 cents, pickled pork 25 cents, coffee 50 cents, beefsteak fresh 25 to 30 cents, onions 20 to 25 cents, cheese \$1.00, butter \$1.00 to \$1.25. These prices are more than one-half less than they were last year. Vegetables are plenty. The house I am boarding at sets a very good table.

It will be four weeks next Tuesday since I came here. In that time there have been more houses built than there were here when I came; there is a perfect building mania.

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Placerville, Spét. 8, 1850.

Dear Wife:

I will send you some money as soon as I can. I could purchase a draft but they are so uncertain for the banking houses are breaking every day so that we would stand a chance to lose it.

We have had as much business as we could attend to but do not get paid for more than a fourth of what we do, as the sickness is among the immigrants and they have no money. A good deal of it we will never get.

We built a house and have sold it out. It cost us four or five hundred dollars to build; we sold it for sixteen hundred in monthly payments well secured.

This is a hard country; plenty to eat, but the sleeping is what goes hardest with me lying on the soft side of a plank with a buffalo robe in under and wooly blankets over.

I have had the hardest spell of sickness for the last month that I ever had in my life. I thought I should kick the bucket. I started for the city with an ox team after a load of goods. I was not well when I started. That night I slept in the wagon and took cold so that before morning I was attacked severely with dysentery. I had no medicine with me and could not get any until I reached the city which took me three days. By this time it had got a fair hold on me and it was a hard job to get it to let go. I staid in the city three days.

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Letter not dated but postmarked
Sacramento, October 14.

Dear Father:

I have left Placerville where I have been doing business. I could have done well there but was unable most of the time to do anything on account of illness. As soon as I got well enough to travel I left and have now been in the city eight days. Five of us have a tent and cook and sleep ourselves, so that it does not cost as much to live. We have all been sick but are all getting better. For my part I feel like a new man.

If my health will permit I can make money fast and as soon as I can I will be home.