ONCE more I find myself on the wide spreading plains, and mingling with the great western tide of California emigrants. We are all pushing on briskly and quite pleasantly toward our grand goal. The emigrants this year are finely situated; good dry roads, with a plenty of grass out a little way. Some 3,000 wagons are ahead of us on this route, (a little more than I had last year) and from what I can see I cannot conclude that the emigration this year is larger than last; the roads are far better, and also the grass; the wood is getting very scarce. The first emigrants suffered severely. [They] started too soon, anticipating grass and taking a few days feed, and the cold late spring caught them out without grass. We see frequent dead horses on the road. All are starting light loaded, and some even on foot, attempting to pack provisions on their back. I fear such must suffer for I know none who can spare them any. The Boone people are mostly forward, though some are near and others behind us. We are progressing finely having made 23 miles to-day. Our company are all well and in fine spirits. At the ferry at St. Jo. the Kickapoos demanded a toll of 10cts per wagon, for crossing their territory, and at Wolf creek we had another 25 cts. to pay for crossing a bridge. There are more horse teams, and more light teams going this year than last.

General good health obtains among the emigration, and I see no reason for their friends to expect anything but a prosperous journey for them. To-morrow we will reach the big Nimehaw [sic], and then onward for the Blue. For the present farewell till you hear again from your old friend &c.

"Old Boone," to Col. W. F. Switzler
Weekly Missouri Statesman, June 7, 1850

Getting Along "Finely," Passing All Teams
Little Blue, May 17, 1849

Here we all are 270 miles west of Independence and all well and travelling on finely. Our spirits were enlivened to-day by a back mail with late news from California, and we are a merry, whistling, whip-cracking crowd; and can almost fancy ourselves through the trip and its troubles and back at home again . . . laden with shining Californians. We are getting on finely,
with good roads and cool weather, at the tune of 20 and 25 miles a day, and our stock rather improving. We passed within the last three days 150 teams, and are fast overtaking others. There are now within sight of us perhaps near 200 wagons stretched out in long lines over the undulating plains. I perhaps placed my estimate of the numbers in my last rather too low; it may reach 12,000 or more, yet we are all decidedly ahead of the mass. Those who started first are falling behind with exhausted teams, and we shall over haul hundreds within a few days. We shall reach the Platte tomorrow and then for a pull at buffalo, for which we are getting very impatient. Some of our amateur huntsmen have already scoured the vales around in search of some veteran of the herd, but as yet without effect, the beautiful antelope alone peers over some ridge and flies away with the fleetness of the wind. Dr. Lenoir and his mess have lost their wagon, but no other has at all failed, and they are refitted with another and move on much better. Some enterprising frontiersman has brought up back mails for the emigrants, with papers, and promises us on his return to take letters for us all to St. Joseph at 25 cents each and he will make quite a speculation, for all will send one or two to friends and families. He talks of returning soon again and going on to the mountains, which he might do with the utmost safety, for there are many lone travellers and solitary teams which move on with impunity. The Indians seem to have all scampered off or they never were here, for we have not seen one for nearly 150 miles. There is far more danger of white men purloining stock from Indians. Some skulking dogs were caught this morning by a neighboring train posting off with their mules and only escaped by the swiftest flight. The valleys of the Blue are truly beautiful, but not fertile, nor well timbered, and the ridges around seem incapable of producing anything beyond buffalo grass. But I must close as the glad cry of supper is raised around our camp fire, so good bye till you hear again from your friend.

"Old Boone," to Col. W. F. Switzler
Missouri Statesman, June 8, 1849

Emigrants at the Little Blue
Little Blue, May 21, 1850

Expecting an opportunity of sending in letters to the States tomorrow, I hastily pen for you a few items. We left St. Joseph on the 9th. The grass upon the plains was not then sufficient for the subsistence of our teams but by hauling a few days' feed of grain we have got on well enough. Even at this time the grass is quite short. In three or four days however we shall be upon the Big Platte where it is plentiful.

The Californians generally, are in high spirits and good health moving on bravely toward their point of destination. Some little sickness has made its appearance lately, and cases of fever, plural sy [sic] etc. not infrequently
occur. Between the Big Blue River and this place we have passed four "newly made graves"—one of R. Melone of Huntsville, who accidentally shot himself through the head. Unfortunate ones! they have a lonesome resting place instead of the realization of their golden dreams.

The crowd upon this route is perfectly astonishing. In travelling hours the wagons block the road as far as eye can see. It is impossible to camp within any short distance of the road without being surrounded with trains. It is not uncommon for 12 to 15 caralls [sic] to be in sight of our camp. Last Friday we passed the junction of the Independence and St. Joseph routes. The former from appearance has not been much travelled yet: and from gentlemen who came that way, I learn that over two-thirds of the emigrants from that point are yet behind. The only mark those early trains have left behind them is the trees cut down here upon the Little Blue to brouse their teams upon after their grain had given out.

We meet more or less returning Californians everyday. They all exhibit woful [sic] physiognomies and have many wonderful tales to tell us of the elephant ahead. These backsliders are very useful to the emigrants as they supply the place of a mail and can always tell how far ahead to wood and water. Nearly one half of the emigration upon the St. Jo route have horse teams. They pass us now in a quite gaily style but before they get beyond the sink of St. Mary's or ascend the Sierra Nevada I fear we shall have opportunity to return the compliment.

There is a tribe of white Indians upon these plains at this time that are more dangerous than the Pawnees. They carry on horse and mule stealing pretty extensively and even oxen do not escape their attention. One of these gentlemen who had been caught was undergoing trial yesterday evening—have not heard the result.

These few lines I send to the St. Jo P. Office by a trader who has been to Fort Laramie. We heard of no complaints among the emigrants ahead and that the first trains instead of having broken down their teams are getting on finely.

W. R. R., to Col. Switzler
Weekly Missouri Statesman, June 14, 1850

Company too Large, But Making Progress and Having Fun

Camp in the Valley of Little Blue
May 24, 1850

Because of the illness of one of our company (Mr. James Austin, who has had the measles for several days,) we are lying by to-day, and I embrace this leisure time to sketch you a few lines apprising you of our progress westward. Our company was organized on the 15th by electing H. H. Wilkerson Captain, with 39 men and 10 wagons—all Boone county emi-
grants. Since that time 5 other wagons have joined the company, making in all 57 men, 15 wagons, and 103 head of animals. We are this far on our journey without any serious accident or misfortune of any kind. Several of our teams have run away, and upon one occasion five were running at one time, but fortunately they were stopped without serious injury to either animals or wagons. We have been favored thus far with fine weather and dry roads. The grass when we started was quite short, but by hauling feed we have gotten along very comfortably without injury to our stock; indeed many of them are in better order now than when we left home. We have made good drives every day. The grass is now getting very fine. We have passed a great number of ox-teams, and some horse and mule teams, and expect to pass a great many more between this and the North Platte. From all the information I can get we are about in the centre of the emigration.

I was told yesterday evening by Mr. Rubidoux, whom we met upon his return to St. Jo. from off a trading expedition among the Indians, that there were 5,000 wagons ahead of us between this and Fort Laramie, his son having kept an account of all they met. He also told me that he met David H. Hickman and Co. at Ash Hollow; says they were getting along well; thinks there will be two ferry companies on the North Platte besides theirs, and that all will make money. There is but little sickness among the emigrants this spring. I have not heard of but two cases of cholera on the road.

Our company is rather too large. We experience some little inconvenience in crossing bad places, nevertheless we are getting along smoothly and quietly — no family quarrels.

We are a "rough and ready" set of looking chaps. Could you step into our camp this evening and see our long beards and sunburnt visages — thinks you would come to the conclusion that we were all the immediate descendants of Esau. Some of the company are so fitch taked (?) ugly with their long beards and tanned faces that they can’t even sleep at night. Our old friend G. W. Wills being considered the ugliest man in the company, has by unanimous consent carried the “Jack Knife.” The opinion of the company however is rapidly undergoing a change and I think in a very few days friend Wills will have to fork the knife over to Harvey G. Berry — his title being the best.

The whole camp was thrown into a fit of excitement this morning by the appearance of a large drove of Buffalo. They no sooner made their appearance, than they were charged upon by at least 30 men, horse foot and dragoons were all out in full chase. It was truly an exciting and interesting scene. The chase was kept up for about an hour, when five out of the drove were murdered and the most choice bits brought into camp. We are now, as you may well suppose, feasting on the good things of the world.

A BOONE EMIGRANT, to Col. W. F. Switzler

Weekly Missouri Statesman, June 21, 1850
California Emigrant Letters

Indian Scare at the Kansas Crossing

Union Post, Upper Crossing of Kansas River
June 5, 1850

A feud is at present existing between the Pottawatomies and Pawnees. Three weeks ago some horses belonging to the Potawatomies were stolen immediately west of the Catholic Mission, twelve miles from here, by the Pawnees. On discovering their loss, the Potawatomies pursued the thieves, killed three, brought in the scalps, and recovered the horses. Since then several false alarms as the invasion of the country by a Pawnee army, have taken place. Parties of armed Pottawatomies, Sacs, and Foxes went out to scour the country and give them battle. They proceeded some sixty or seventy miles west of this, and returned reporting no Pawnees. This Indian excitement caused no little uneasiness among some of the more timid emigrants. The most incongruous and laughable reports were put in circulation, originating probably from the following circumstance. One of the Pawnees killed, as before stated, had his "war trophy" about his person, which was, of course, taken possession of by his victor. It is a piece of scarlet cloth, about twelve inches by six inches square, worked with beads and quills, and having in it, pendant therefrom, eight skeins of human hair, and forty of horse hair. Three skeins of the human hair were white men's, and five black Indian hair, thus giving evidence of the Pawnee's prowess as warrior and horse stealer. The fact of the white men's hair on the trophy caused the alarm of the emigrants above spoken of but we see no cause for the belief that the white men's scalps were recently taken. The man killed is represented as a man of some forty years of age, and may have been a warrior... for twenty years!

The Pottawatomies and their allies, the Sacs and Foxes, are on the alert. If the Pawnees should come down, they will meet with a warm reception!

Missouri Republican, June 16, 1850

Emigration on the Independence Road

Union Post, Upper Crossing of Kansas River
June 5, 1850

Thinking you will have no objection to receive some information in regard to the spring's emigration to California by way of this place and vicinity, it may be stated that it began about the middle of April — much too soon for the season — for the weather has been so cold, and the grass so backward till within three weeks ago, that animals could not possibly thrive and perform the work required of them, without feeding on corn, every grain of which was taken up here, while it lasted, at $1.50 per bushel. No regular records have been kept on the different ferries on this river, of the numbers of persons, animals, and teams; yet, from the estimates of
the ferrymen, we may assume that about 2,750 wagons have crossed, and
about 4,000 head of loose cattle, in droves of from 150 to 350, viz: cows and
calves, young steers, and yearlings. If we (including those who travel with
pack-mules and ponies) estimate four persons to the team (which is cer-
tainly a low average) it will show that through this neighborhood alone
11,000 persons have passed on their way to California and Oregon. A few
of the earlier teams, after having crossed the Blue Fork of Kansas, and
[continued] between that stream and the Platte, have returned reporting
no grass and very cold weather; others again have taken the back track,
having lost some of their members by sickness, said to be small pox and
cholera, although in general the health of the country is good. This is evi-
dent from so few deaths among so many people. If cholera has existed, it
must have been of the sporadic kind; a few fatal cases of small pox occurred,
but it did not spread.

Missouri Republican, June 16, 1850

Grass Needed

Near Platte River, May 10, 1850

We left St. Joseph on Sunday the 28th of April and are now encamped
within ten miles of the Platte river, which makes it about 260 miles out;
we will probably get to Fort Kearney to-morrow. We have had little or
no grass yet and the prospects are bad as it is cool and dry. We left St. Jo.
with about 25 bushels of grain to the team and have about 10 bushels to the
team left. Our company consists of 8 wagons and 36 men.

The roads are fine and we are all getting along very well and without
any fuss, though if we don't get grass in 5 or 6 days I can't tell what will
become of us. I must come to a close, as it is now about 12 o'clock and I
am very much fatigued. I will write again the first opportunity. I send this
by a Government train.

W. H. Northcutt to Col. W. F. Switzler
Weekly Missouri Statesman, June 14, 1850

A Forty-Niner Has Better Record in 1850

Great Platte, 300 miles from St. Joseph
May 29, 1850

It gives me special pleasure to address you once more from these great
plains. Our company are all well and have made our drive to this point in
12 days, an average of 25 a day; a most extraordinary drive for oxen. The
Emigration have fine roads this season, but rather poor grass; it is so dry
here that it is quite poor, and if it should be as dry on the mountains, I cannot
tell what is to become of the stock. Many of the stock are already failing
by the way. Fine health generally prevails, and the crowds are generally
moving on in fine spirits, tho' we see many long sour faces, taking the
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retrograde march. There are more I suppose going this year than last by far, and the mule and horse teams are chiefly in the advance, for some sharp trader brought up 800 bushels of corn from Tacs, to Laramie, and sold it out at $8 a bushel, and thus aided the most forward. Indians so far are very quiet, and but few stock are lost, though the men guard cautiously. We have buffalo around us, but have no time to hunt them. The Boone boys who have mule teams are ahead of us, but those with oxen, with or behind us. I expect to make the Diggins by the 20th of Aug. I have beat my drive of last year to this point 5 days. In conclusion, I can only repeat for the satisfaction of our friends, that our company are all well and getting on well and cheerfully . . .

F. T. Russell, to Col. W. F. Switzler
Weekly Missouri Statesman, June 12, 1850

Scenes at Ft. Kearney

Ft. Kearney, May 21, 1850

The first train en route for the gold regions reached this point on the 13th of April. Their stock were in but poor condition, and having no grass and but little grain, they must have suffered extremely, although I have heard nothing of them since they passed this point. From that time up to the date of this letter, the number of wagons that have passed this point amount to twenty seven hundred and fifty-four; there has been an average of about four and a half men to each wagon, and a total of about seventy-six ladies.

The emigration has started at least one month too soon this year. It is now over a month since the first train passed, and there is scarcely a sufficiency of grass for the animals and cattle to subsist on. A number of persons, in the early part of the emigration, set fire to the prairie "to see it burn," never dreaming of the injury they were inflicting upon those coming behind them. This has been very injurious to the emigration, and it is supposed will cause a great deal of trouble in California. Several persons have been heard to say that "This affair is not ended yet," and persons names have been ascertained, who have acted thus imprudently, and there is not a doubt in the mind of anyone here, but that there will be a fuss about it when all hands meet in the diggings.

On the 20th of April, a Scotchman passed here with a wheelbarrow, refusing to join any company, saying in his own peculiar dialect, "Na, na, mun, I ken ye'll all break doon in the mountains, an I'll gang along mysel.'" He appeared to be a man about 35 years of age, well armed, and did not appear to be in the least fatigued.

A man by the name of Lyons, from Iowa, lost four mules and three horses on the 10th of this month, by a stampede; some of his men pursued them, and found them in the possession of a party of Indians, who refused
to give them up. Major Chilton, on hearing of it, ordered a party of dragoons to go and recover the animals. When the party came to the wagons where the remainder of the company were, they heard so many contradictory reports about the runaway animals, that they were compelled to return.

The emigration has not suffered by the Indians at all this year, and seven-eighths of them have not seen an Indian from the time they left St. Joseph until they reached this point.

"OBSERVER"
Missouri Republican, June 15, 1850

Busy as a Whig Editor
Fort Kearney, May 26, 1850

Not meeting with an opportunity to send you what I had written on the 24th until I reached this place, I will hastily add a few more words. I am sorry to inform you that James Austin is no more. He breathed his last on the evening of the 24th and was decently intered [sic] on the morning of the 25th. A more noble and generous hearted young man never lived. As a Mess-mate friend and companion he was loved and esteemed by all. But alas! he is gone — gone to the world of spirits.

Up to the 24th day of this month there had passed this place 3,462 wagons, averaging 4½ men to the wagon. The first emigration passed the 13th of April. We have not yet come to the junction of the Council Bluff road with ours, and have no means of ascertaining the number that have traveled that route. We have traveled hard on to 30 miles to-day — passed between 4 and 500 wagons. Among other trains passed to-day was one called "the Jacks Family emigrating Company" — in which [were] 17 families all from Jackson county, Mo. I thought when I left home that my opportunities for writing would be better than they have been; but I find that if a man does his duty upon this trip, he is kept as busy as a whig editor and has little time to write.

"A Boone Emigrant," to Col. W. F. Switzler
Weekly Missouri Statesman, June 12, 1850

"Novel Spectacles"
Fort Kearney, May 29, 1850

According to promise, I drop you these few lines. Our teams camped ten miles below here last night, and I hastened on this morning for the purpose of writing. I have arrived and find the place crowded with men on the same business. Not finding a place more convenient I have placed a plank against a wall and am now writing in the broad open sunshine. I learn from the Post Master that up to this date five thousand wagons have passed this place. We have passed since we left St. Joseph, at least two thousand.
The grass up to this point is tolerable good; but we learn that it is scant ahead. The emigration to California this year presents some novel spectacles. I see men travelling in every way you could imagine. Some a-foot with packs on their backs; some with carts; some with drays, one horse hitched before the other; and to cap the climax, we passed two fellows yesterday whose outfit consisted of one old white cow, which they had packed and were leading. It occurred to me that it was the most convenient outfit that I had seen — the cow furnishing them not only with transportation, but also with the means of subsistence.

O. Guitar, to Col. W. F. Switzler
Weekly Missouri Statesman, June 21, 1850

The Wave Reaches Ft. Laramie
Ft. Laramie, May 4, 1850

The entire Yankee nation is once more on the move towards the gold mines of California, and are rushing ahead with an impetuosity that throws the “furor” of the last year far in the shade.

Although there is scarcely grass enough yet on the prairies to satisfy an antelope, sixty-nine wagons, and about three hundred and thirty men have already passed this post, and many more are but a short distance behind.

The first company, consisting of twenty-four men, with six light wagons, reached here on the 29th of April. It was from Kendall country, Ill., and commanded by S. B. Craw.

The second company, from Wayne county, Ohio, under Capt. Denison, and numbering two hundred and fifty men with fifty wagons, came in today, and close on their heels was Captain Burrough’s company from Kendall county, Ill., with fifty men and fourteen wagons. Five men and one wagon from Rock Island, Ill., also reached here today.

All these trains are provided with forage up to this point, and are well fitted out. The experience of last year does not appear to have been lost, for not a gold digger, gold washer, saw mill or steamboat has yet been seen amongst the baggage of the emigrants. They have brought with them only such things as are necessary.

It is said that the emigration across the Plains this year will be double what it was last — a statement difficult to be believed by a person who had to stem the current of last summer. The Indians begin to talk of emigrating to the East.

All has been quiet at this post during the winter, but the inundation of the gold diggers has completely upset us. The California fever begins to show itself in the most malignant form, and is rapidly spreading amongst the laborers, teamsters, carpenters, etc. Its ravages amongst the troops are not quite so severe, as the medicines used to subdue it are wholesome and powerful.
A large party is forming amongst the Indian traders in this vicinity, and will leave in about ten days.

“CHEYENNE”
Missouri Republican, June 15, 1850

What Has Broken Loose in the States?

Fort Laramie, May 14, 1850

What has broken loose in the States? . . . About every five minutes during the day, a white top wagon with a pick-axe slung to its side, rolls in from the frontier, stops a few minutes, while the driver, with the “want of gold” stamped upon his appearance, enquires for the shortest cut to California, and then disappears over the prairies in the direction of the Pacific. But, seriously, this California gold must be turning the nation crazy. All honest and industrious pursuits appear to be abandoned for the precious occupation of gold digging, which at best, is nothing more than a grand lottery where the blanks far outnumber the prizes. Should California, however, yield the amount of gold that it is anticipated she will, God grant that the evils which have inevitably befallen other nations making similar discoveries, may be warded off from ours.

Up to the present date, as well as can be ascertained, nine hundred and fifty men, and two hundred and fifteen wagons have passed this place for the mines. Last year at this time, not a person had made his appearance.

All represent that the emigration of this year will be double that of last. Should this estimate prove correct over 50,000 persons and 12,000 wagons will cross, or rather attempt to cross the mountains this season.

“Cheyenne”
Missouri Republican, June 9, 1850

Description of Emigration Seen at Ft. Laramie

Fort Laramie, May 14, 1850

As was the case last year, all kinds and descriptions of persons, from the poor devil without a cent in his pocket and scarcely a rag to his back, to the well conditioned individual with his pockets well lined are now seen pushing in hot haste towards the West. The most distinguished character who has yet made his appearance this Spring is the “wheel barrow man” who dropped upon us yesterday. He left St. Joseph about twenty-five days ago carrying his all in a light wheel barrow, and has out-stripped almost everything on the road. He appeared in high spirits and felt confident that he would be the first man in the “diggings” by this route. He enquired how the grass was ahead, but reckoned his animals wouldn’t want much, and then pushed on to the tune of Yankee Doodle towards the setting sun — such a man must succeed.
California Emigrant Letters

The strangest set of all however that has yet made its advent is a party of footmen numbering some fifteen or twenty. These men carry everything on their backs, provisions, blankets and all. They look a little the worse for wear, but appear to get along well. They may possibly succeed in passing from post to post until they reach Fort Hall, but how they are to reach California from that point, a distance of over 800 miles, is a problem that only they themselves can solve.

Several emigrants have been left here sick in charge of the surgeons of the Post . . .

There has been but one death on the road thus far . . . Another man was brought in to-day with one of his legs broken. Maj. Sanderson, the officer in command, renders every assistance to the emigrants that lies in his power, so that all, unless their wants are too numerous, go on their way rejoicing.

“Cheyenne”
Missouri Republican, June 9, 1850

Overland Amid Suffering
Sacramento City, July 29, 1850

I started with a large company from Oquawka, Illinois, fitted out with four horse trains. We left the Missouri river on the 26th [of] April, from Council Bluffs. Up the Platte, a country destitute of timber, we made a quick trip to Fort Laramie; although we had no grass whatever, the dead grass having been burned by the immigrants ahead of us . . . Who these men . . . were I could not learn. From Fort Laramie, we found an excellent road across the Black Hills; up the Sweetwater, a beautiful stream, we had no difficulty whatever; across the Rocky Mountains we found good grass all the way, and had a rain storm every day. (This will prove almost incredible to last year’s immigrants.)

Arriving at Fremont’s “Place of Fountains,” we struck Hudspeth’s Cut-off, a delightful road, traversing the most romantic regions I ever travelled. From Raft river to the Humboldt we met no serious obstruction, but the trip from Stoney Point to El Dorado, will not soon be forgotten. Here was much suffering. Men who never before knew want had to walk over dusty roads and parched plains; some were entirely without provisions or money, and had to beg and even steal their food. I saw one party who had lived six days on a few pounds of coffee.

One man from Wisconsin, having lost his provisions in crossing Green river, lived for two weeks on four pounds of pilot bread. But enough of this. Suffice it to say, when on the Sierra Nevada, even some of those who had heretofore been well supplied, having lost by theft, were compelled to dispose of horses for flour, at the rate of a horse for ten pounds, I saw several horses which had the steaks taken off them — some men who pos-
sessed too much honesty to steal being forced to this. Our company all came through safely however, being only reduced to a short allowance on the Nevada.

The inquiry will very naturally be made, what was the cause of all this suffering? My answer is, that the immigrants, generally this year started with not enough provisions, mostly expecting to make the trip in a much shorter time than it was accomplished.

Again, many persons took the “Lawson” or “Green horn Cut-off,” and, in returning again to the old route, lost much time.

My note is hastily written, and I have ommitted many incidents which might be deemed interesting by those who have never taken the trip. I have said nothing of the immense destruction of property; swimming rivers and wading in alkali sloughs; the seranading of mosquitoes; the lonely waste, with no trace of any green thing, except perhaps a few gold-smitten immigrants. Let these things be buried in the water of Lethe.

S. H. N. Patterson, formerly editor of Oquawka (Illinois) Spectator, to the Placer Times
St. Joseph Adventure, Sept. 27, 1850

Remember the Donner Party
Great Meadows, Humboldt River
Sept. 12, 1850

Many women are on the road with families of children, who have lost their husbands by cholera, and who never will cross the mountains without aid. I have met intelligent packers who left Missouri river on the 1st day of July; they concur in the statement, that there are yet twenty thousand back of the Desert. Fifteen thousand of this number are now destitute of all kinds of provisions; yet the period of the greatest suffering has not yet arrived, if the supposition be correct, twenty-five thousand are yet back of the Sink. It will be morally impossible for ten thousand of this number to reach the mountains before the commencement of winter; and the probability is, that they will then find these mountains covered with snow from five to twenty feet deep. All remember the fate of the Donner party.

Capt. Waldo
Sacramento Transcript, Sept. 29, 1850, quoted by St. Joseph Adventure, November 29, 1850

Emigrants are Starving
Great Meadows, Truckee River
Sept. 15, 1850

From Boiling Springs to this place (Great Meadows) I have met with but few who have any provisions at all, except the poor exhausted animals
which have worked from the States. Footmen, who comprise nearly one-fourth of the number now on the road, are not blessed even with such food as this, but are reduced to the necessity of subsisting on the putrefied flesh of such dead animals as so abundantly line the road. This has produced the most fatal consequences. Disease and death are now mowing them down by hundreds.

Those emigrants that are yet back several hundred miles must receive relief, or die by starvation; and to whom can they look but to the citizens of California for their salvation. The land of their homes is too far distant to render aid in this hour of distress and danger. When I left your city, the scarcity of money was pled as an excuse for not contributing for the relief of the emigrants. If dust is scarce, finger-rings and breast-coins are not. There are enough of them in California to send bread to every starving emigrant between Green River and the Sierra Nevada mountains. And I would ask, is it possible for an American to wear a ring without blushing with shame . . .

Capt. Waldo
Sacramento Transcript, Sept. 29,
1850, quoted by St. Joseph Adventure,
Nov. 29, 1850

Emigrants Deluded
Sacramento City, Sept. 6, 1850

For several days before leaving the station, I sought from every available source, information about the numbers and condition of the immigration still behind, the result of which satisfied me that there were about 10,000 on the way this side of Salt Lake and Bear river who had not crossed the Great Desert, at least one-half of whom would be destitute of teams and subsistence before reaching Carson river. About one-half of these immigrants were deluded by false reports, and led to take a wrong road from Salt Lake, leading around to the south of the Lake and uniting with the old road on Humboldt river, about 200 miles above the Sink. The distance by this road is greatly increased, and a desert about nineteen miles long has to be crossed.

Most of the animals on this route perished on the desert, and not under the hardships of the road, but perished for want of water and food. Those who are fortunate enough to get over the desert, will have to travel nearly three hundred miles before they reach Carson River, and but few of them will reach this point with any means to purchase subsistence. I was credibly informed that several thousand persons, among them many families, took this road; but up to the time of my leaving Johnson’s station only a few of these persons (no families) had passed on their way in, thus leaving room
for the fear that much suffering is behind among this body of the immigrants.

At the time of my departure from Johnson's station provisions were exceedingly scarce among both immigrants and traders, but I met on the road large supplies in the hand of enterprising traders. I think, therefore, the amount of provisions enroute to the desert in the hands of traders, and the amount lately sent forward by the active benevolence of the citizens of California may be sufficient to supply the immigrants.

The Carson river seems to be the only road traveled by immigrants, in great numbers, the Truckee route having been abandoned on account of high water and other causes.

Col. A. R. Ralston, to the "Committee on Relief"
St. Joseph Adventure, Nov. 8, 1850

Overland in 1850

CALIFORNIA, Nov. 10, 1850

I hardly know where to begin, or what to say in regard to the trip, an every day's travel being sufficient to give material for a letter of itself. Although the trip was hard throughout, yet we did not know what hardships were until reaching the Humboldt river. At Fort Laramie we learned that there were ten thousand ahead of us. For about a hundred miles from Fort Laramie, we had tolerable grass up the mountains; after that, we had scarcely any. We were never out of sight of snow for a day at a time, from the time we first caught a glimpse of the Rocky Mountains until now. We cut up our remaining wagon seventeen miles east of the south pass, and packed the balance of the way, having sold one wagon before for $15. While we were packing, we laid by for three days, and it snowed on us every day, and in guarding our horses at night we would nearly freeze. We reached the south pass I think about the 18th of June; there was no grass after getting a hundred miles up the mountain, of any importance, except as we could find it in small patches some distance from the road, and a few scattering spears that the horses could pick from among the sage bushes, until we reached Bear river on the Sublette cut-off. Up this river we had very fine grass. We took the Sublette cut-off, and some other cut-off, leaving Fort Hall eighteen or twenty miles to our right, and Mormon City about 150 to 200 miles to our left which was nearer by about 100 miles than the Salt Lake route. Soon after entering on the Sublette cut-off, we had to cross a desert of 55 miles in length, which we did in the night, without stopping until morning. [Here we were] about five miles of the end, at Green River. On Green river we found no grass, and were detained until evening in crossing, when we went four miles and found grass, nearly at
night, making 24 hours that our horses were without grass (except a little that they picked when we stopped five miles from Green river on the desert,) and 36 hours from Green river, we struck for Bear river, up which stream, for about 75 or 100 miles, we had fine grass and a plenty of mosquitoes [sic]; the marks of some of their bites I carried with me to California, (1,000 miles.) We kept up the valleys of a good many smaller streams, after leaving Bear river, the names of which I do not now recollect; on most of which we found grass scarce and in spots, until we came to Humboldt, which we followed for about 400 miles having to go some 100 miles further than the emigrants did last year, on account of high water. This stream will be remembered by the emigrants as long as they live. Its waters are strongly impregnated with alkali, and it is all the water that they have until reaching Carson river. When we went down it, it was very high and besides the main river, it spreads out into great many slough, covering a large part of the valley, or bottom land, and from the nature of the water and soil, (impregnated with alkali) it rendered the bottom so miry that we could not turn our horses on it, for what little grass they could find; after coming down it for about 75 miles, the only way we could get grass, was to swim the river, and cut, with our knives grass from among the willow brush, and swim over with it, or wade the sloughs and cut it in the same way, if we could find it to cut, which was not always the case, by any means, for with all the pain and labor we used we could not often find more grass for a dozen horses than one could eat. I did not swim the river myself, but waded the sloughs, as a great many were drowned in swimming the river, and as I was not a good swimmer, I preferred wading, which I had to do two or three times a day, through alkali water, from waist to shoulder deep, carrying grass, if I found any, on my shoulder, or under my arms, and then ride all day and sleep all night in my wet clothes; for the reason that with guarding the horses at night, to prevent the Indians from stealing them, cooking our meals when we stopped, and then spending two or three hours, evening, morning and noon, in cutting grass for the horses with our knives, we were so tired and broken down that we didn’t care for any thing, so that we could get a few moments rest. It would not do to lay by and rest for a few days, for if we did, thousands of stock were passing every day, and destroying every thing before them; and we attribute all our good luck in getting here, to making an early start and keeping ahead of the emigration, and with care and attention to our horses.

The alkali nature of the country, besides our toil and labor, had such a tendency to make us sleepy, that we asked nothing better than to lay down in the sand, dust, in the hot sun and sleep, with the sweat rolling from us. Besides all these hardships, and a thousand more, our provisions began to run short, and it was necessary to push ahead on that account. We had not as much provisions, when we left Humboldt, as with quarter rations, would
last us more than half way down that river, and were then about 700 miles from California; and nearly every body was in the same fix themselves. Scarcely any one had provisions enough; last year they took too much and this year too little. The fact is, every body was deceived in the distance, and the length of time it would take them to make the trip, and wishing to go as quick as possible, and take as little load as possible, they made the great blunder of not taking enough to eat, and if it had not been for the tough alkali meat of half-starved oxen, which was sold for from 30 to 50 cents per pound, and provisions brought out from California by traders and speculators, almost the entire emigration of 75,000 men must have perished. I frequently felt so sleepy and hungry in coming down the Humboldt, that I would have given a hundred dollars to have had as much cold milk, and hot corn bread and butter as I could eat, and then lay down under the shade of a tree half a day and rest and sleep.

Our horses were in good order until we reached the Humboldt, but nobody would have known them to be the same horses in two weeks time afterwards. We would pass every day from fifty to a hundred horses, mules, and oxen, mired in the boggy and spungy bottom of the Humboldt left to struggle for a few days in the mud, and then die. The whole country appeared so dreary and dismal, so forsaken and cursed of the Almighty, that it reminded me every day of the curse pronounced against Babylon, and I cannot now look back upon our hardships, and sufferings, on the Humboldt without shuddering, and returning thanks to that God who has safely brought me through so many dangers, toils and snares. The Indians were very troublesome on the Humboldt, shooting the men at night while on guard, stealing horses, &c., though we escaped their arrows, and had none of our horses stolen. We followed down the Humboldt until we came to its sink. It sinks in the edge of the desert, forming a lake some four or five miles over, covered with rushes and luxuriant growth of different kinds of vegetation. We were glad when we came to the sink of the Humboldt, for if any mortals were ever tired of a stream, we were of that, and we would have been glad to see it sink ten thousand times, if we could have been supplied with water of any better kind; but mean as the Humboldt is, we could never have got here without it. Off from its bottoms there is as much desert as in the great desert itself throughout its whole length; and there is not much difference between the desert and any of the country from 100 miles this side of the western boundary of Missouri and California, off from the water courses. Leave them any where and you are in a barren, sandy desert. We started into the desert, (that is, from the sink, although the country before that was as much a desert as any of the ballance [sic],) about 5 o'clock in the evening, (having previously prepared our grass at a place called the meadows, about 20 miles from the sink,) intending to go about half way over and feed and rest our horses, and get through early
in the morning before the heat of the day; but in consequence of traveling so much at night we had lost a great deal of sleep, not having slept four hours in the last four days, and thinking we would lay down and take a little rest while the horses were eating, we fell asleep and never woke up until daybreak—in consequence we had to cross the worst and sandiest part of the desert in the heat of the day. We got through about one, our horses and ourselves having nearly given out. A mule having trod upon my canteen and mashed it so that I could not carry it more than half full of water, I was out of water nearly the whole of the way. There were some that hauled water out to the desert from Carson river and sold it at different prices from a dollar a quart to five dollars a swallow. A great many died on the desert from heat and thirst. One man offered another eighteen dollars if he would take a drink of water to a friend of his that was dying of thirst. From the sink of the Humboldt to Carson river, on the route we travelled, is about 40 miles; so that is the width of the desert where we crossed it. The Carson river sinks in one edge of the desert, and the Humboldt in the other. The last of the desert is exceedingly difficult to travel in, on account of the great depth and heat of the sand. When we crossed there was about 100 dead horses on it, and any quantity of wagons, gear, clothing and property of every description. I am informed by others who have lately come in, that it was now estimated that there were 4,000 horses and 2,000 wagons; another told me there were enough dead horses, to put them touching, to line the road from one side of the desert to the other, on one side, and enough wagons to line it on the other; and that the smell arising from the dead horses was so bad the road could not be travelled. We crossed another desert of 26 miles, on Carson river, and another of 18 miles. On the first was a piece of the prettiest road I ever saw, being as level and nearly as hard as a plank floor. On the latter part of the road up the Carson river, we had good grass. For the first 50 miles grass was scarce. Although 10,000 were ahead of us, there were but few deaths from sickness. The latter part of the emigration suffered from sickness. On leaving Carson river, we commenced ascending the Sierra Nevada. From that to the first mines is said to be 120 miles, over the roughest, rockiest, and steepest country that a wagon (I expect) ever crossed over. In some places the road runs for miles over snow banks. Any person viewing in imagination, from home the hills and rocks that wagons had to pass over in these mountains, would say that it was next to impossible to get a wagon over them. There is no grass through the whole of the Sierra Nevada, except a little that a sheep could live on; the only wonder to me is, how stock of any kind could make the trip, and greater still how horses could do it. We had better luck in getting our horses through than any one that I have heard of, as we did not lose one; I left one at the meadows to be recruited...
Nothing but Santa Fe mules, or heavy-set small American mules are fit for the trip, unless it be camels.

We started from Independence the 29th of April, and reached the first diggings the 29th of July, making the trip in 92 days. The road was measured and made 2100 miles from Council Bluffs, to Weovertown, the first mines, and fifty miles from there to the Sacramento; then if you count the distance you have to go off the route to hunt grass, you may set down the distance at fully 2,500 miles.

A. M. Williams, to his father
Missouri Courier, quoted by the St. Joseph Adventure, Feb. 21, 1851

VI. APPRAISAL OF CALIFORNIA AFTER THE
EMIGRATION OF 1850
God Help the Emigrants of 1850

Yankee Jim’s Dry Diggings,
Aug. 2, 1850

There has been and is still a great deal of gold in this country, but don’t think for a moment that a man can pick up his pile here, just for the wishing — for he can’t . . . It depends on a man’s luck, as much as his exertion. There are now thousands of men more here than will ever get paid for coming, and thousands still on the road.

I thought the country full to overflowing some time ago, but they still come. There are a thousand per day arriving by the overland route. They come into the country strapped, and have no place to strike a lick, for all the diggings are claimed that can be worked . . . In fact it will keep them moving to make a living from now until winter, and then I see no other help for them, but to give up the ghost and die, unless they find some friends that have a little to spare, and will share with them. God help them, I say. There are three times as many here as will ever be able to pay their passage home.

The people in the States listen too much to the reports of merchants and speculators. You must know that it is to their interest to keep fortunes. If a man, more by good luck than anything else, happens to blunder on a few thousand, he lets it get out in San Francisco, and the merchants get hold of it, and then they make capital of that man’s luck, and the people in the States go crazy at once. But you must recollect that it is only one man out of a hundred that makes decent wages, and but one out of a thousand that gets paid for coming here. I speak of the mines.

There are, however, a good many men who make money here by stealing, gambling, trading, tavern-keeping, &c, but the miners have to pay all, and by the time they are done paying they have nothing left for themselves. In fact it will be mighty few that will make much hereafter.
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The country is crowded, and all business is monopolized, except mining, and that is worse, or soon will be, for it will soon all be dug out, or so near it that it will take as hard work for a man to make a living here as in any state of the Union; and a dog’s life it will be at that. My candid opinion of the matter is that all who have a home in the States, or any prospect of getting one, had better be satisfied and stay at it, and appreciate the good things of life.

About the middle of March I started out to the mountains, where I expected to find new diggings, that would prove extensive and rich, but after tramping for three months, I was convinced that the gold was not inexhaustible as I first thought. They may come and tell as many tales about the mines as they please, but wait and it will speak for itself in a short time. There may be a great deal of money dug here, but look at the thousands to dig it, and look at the expense a man is at to live. You must recollect that the mines are the only resource here; all must depend on them; for as to this country being good for anything else, it is all a mistake. Col. Fremont may say what he pleases, but I know something about agricultural pursuits, and I assure you that far short, in a general way, is this of being an agricultural country.

It is no use for me to write to you in regard to next year, for I believe that the country will all be turned topsy-turvy this fall — at least so that a man can’t more than make a living, and that a dog’s life. We are now at work, and don’t make on an average, more than ten dollars per day, and have spent $500 travelling round to find such diggings. These are sentiments, opinions and judgment, if I have any of either of the three.

You may think this strange news to come from the El Dorado of the world; but, strange as it is, it is nevertheless true; just wait a short twelve months, and the doleful tale will be told. You will see more penniless men flocking home, bye-and-bye than you can shake a stick at; though thousands will never get home for the want of means, and some few will come home with fortunes, though more of them will get it by traffic, than any other way.

I have been in nearly all the mines, and I find everywhere crowded to the extreme; and still they come.

“D. J. L.,” formerly of Baltimore, to a friend in that city
Baltimore Sun, quoted in the St. Joseph Adventure, Oct. 28, 1850

The Mines are a Humbug
Sacramento City, Oct. 26, 1850

I think my prospects at present are brighter than almost any body’s that I am acquainted with, yet it is needless to say what I have made since I have
been here. What to write you about the mines I don’t know. All I have to say is, I pity the man who has to make his pile digging, for I do most solemnly assure you that the extravagant stories you hear so frequently in the States, are the most extravagant lies imaginable — the mines are a humbug.

Although I am making money here, yet I am one of the most unhappy beings on earth, and shall continue to be till I return to my family. I suppose you know that I always had a roving disposition; you may depend I am cured of it, when I get home again I shall remain there. I should like to know when people are going to stop coming. What on earth induces them at this late day to come to California, I don’t know, for there is not room enough for the many, many thousands that are already here. The climate scarcely agrees with any body; almost every body gets sick very soon after they land, and a good many never get over it. All the business I ever intend to do here, I shall do between now and next June, for by that time I intend to start for home.

E. R. Pratt to his brother
Missouri Statesman, Feb. 2, 1850

Warning Against Emigrating

New Orleans, Nov. 27, 1850

We, the undersigned, passengers in the steamship Alabama, direct from California, in view of the many false and exaggerated statements in circulation as regards the productiveness of the mines, deem it necessary to give some facts . . . for the consideration of those who contemplate visiting that State for the purpose of mining . . . we are actuated by no motive save a desire to serve those who may be induced to leave comfortable homes for the desperate chance of making a fortune by gold digging.

We have viewed with regret that many false statements circulated in newspapers, based on information derived from the press in California, the conductors of which are engaged in the transportation business, on the Atlantic and the Pacific. The bankers, merchants, and traders . . . assist in no small degree, in misleading the public in regard to the flattering prospects of those engaged in mining. They have induced thousands to seek fortunes in California at great sacrifices, who never would have tried the experiment if they had been informed of the true condition and prospects of those engaged in working the mines.

We believe that thousands have been induced to emigrate to California during the past year, on account of the exaggerated report made by the Government agent, (Mr. King) and by the statements made by delegates in Congress, in relation to the gold bearing quartz. They state that quartz existed in unlimited extent and worth from one to three dollars per pound. These statements coming to the miners through the newspapers published abroad, struck them with profound astonishment. Now there is not one
miner in five hundred, who has found in half his researches a pound of quartz rock worth fifty cents per pound; and the undersigned, who have been deeply interested in the matter have carried machinery to the mines at great expense, to work the quartz, know that none can be found there worth the present price for labor to work it.

It has been estimated that about one hundred thousand Americans were in California at the commencement of the present year. The emigration this year is put down at sixty thousand across the plains, ten thousand over land, through Texas and Mexico, and fifty thousand across the Isthmus. Supposing 20,000 have returned this year... 200,000 Americans remain in the country. If asked what is the condition and prospects of this large number of American citizens, we would say "most deplorable." The forty or fifty thousand who have been engaged in damming and turning rivers... thousands of them are reduced to want and involved in debt for subsistence, etc.

Those who were engaged in the dry diggings... have also been unsuccessful, during the past season.

It was the general opinion of the miners last mentioned that not more than eighty or ninety in a hundred had realized money enough to enable them to return to their families; and that not more than one in twenty has realized a dollar clear of expense during the season.

All hopes of making a fortune in California are lost sight of in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, and the almost universal feeling is to get home. And it is truly heart-rending to witness the general despondency which exists among the miners, and to see stout-hearted and brave men shed tears at their hopeless condition.

St. Joseph Adventure, Dec. 2, 1850

quoting the New Orleans Delta

The Mines are Nearly Exhausted

California, Nov. 10, 1850

On arriving at Sacramento City, I saw men from all parts of the country and from the various mines, and a general feeling of great disappointment and dissatisfaction was the result of the information received. Things were not such as had been represented at home, and a great many, who had money enough, returned home in the first boat. Instead of every body being able to make an ounce to $20 a day, who would work and be sober and industrious, it was found that not one in a hundred was doing it — and they not men who did the most work, but those who had the best luck; while the majority of miners were not making more than their board, which will amount to at least a dollar a day, live as rough as you may and do your own cooking, independent of your expenses for tools, traveling expenses, etc., and every thing you get in California costs. It was also found out that there were more miners on the rivers than could get places to dig — that every
bar, from the sources of the rivers to their mouth was dug up or claimed by persons who had been watching their claims since it stopped raining last spring, waiting for the river to fall so that they could work them. The fact is, that nothing but the bright side of things here has been seen at home, and that much exaggerated [sic], and but few wrote home except those who were doing well, while the great majority of the miners were not heard from. Merchants and speculators, who wish to draw a large number of emigrants, from home, would write letters and have them published in the newspapers, giving the good luck of some individuals, or the amount taken out in a day by a certain number of men — thereby conveying the idea that every one could do as well, who would be industrious and economical; but such is far from being the case. Many have written home that they were making fortunes, when they were scarcely paying expenses. I do not believe that the average amount to the hand, exclusive of expenses, taken from the mines, will exceed two fifty or three dollars per day; while a great many are not doing that well. I know miners who came out last season that are not now able to lay in their winter’s supply of provisions; but I do not think there is any necessity for that. Mining, as well as all other business in California, I consider a perfect lottery. You may dig for weeks, not making much over your board, while some new hand that probably had not before struck a pick, may set down by you, in a place that you may have refused to dig in, and take out in a few days a thousand dollars or so; but the thousand dollar piles are about dug out. He who mines after this winter will, I think, do so with very gloomy prospects of making anything. The rivers are dug over again and again, and the dry diggings will be pretty much gone over this winter.

Gold does not exist everywhere in the ground here, as you have been told, but is found only in the ravines, and streams of the mountains; in some of which you would have to dig from five to fifty feet to find it, while in others you will find it near the surface; but it is not every place in the ravines or streams that will yield gold — some will pay well, while others will not pay for digging, and you may sink a dozen holes in one apparently rich bar that will not more than pay expenses. So it is with the mines in California; I consider them nearly exhausted.

Gold will no doubt be found here for years, but not in quantities sufficient to make it an object to hunt for it. I have not been on the quartz rock region, which I had heard so much about before I left home, and cannot now say anything about it.

A. M. Williams, to his father
Missouri Courier, quoted by the
St. Joseph Adventure, Feb. 21, 1851
California Emigrant Letters

Don't Come to California

Rovoir & Ready, Yuba Co., California

Feb. 10, 1851

I need not tell you, that the golden stories of the California gold mines, have humbugged thousands. This you know from the hurried manner in which not only our own county citizens have left the country, but also thousands from all parts of the United States.

Upon our arrival in this country, we found existing a state of affairs, widely different from what we had imagined, and from what we had a right to expect from the numerous encouraging letters and accounts given of it before we left home. It may be said, with but few exceptions, that all the emigrants that landed here last summer and fall are sorely disappointed. Instead of realizing as they confidently expected when they left their homes and families, ten dollars, and an ounce a day in the mines, they have found it difficult with all the industry they could use, to make the fourth of it, and indeed, but few of them, have been fortunate enough to do this...

A miner's life is one of hardships, toil and exposure. There is no safe or easy way for him to obtain the precious metal, he must come right down to his work, regardless of mud and water, and all such small matters. No man should think of coming to California to make his thousands or his fortune in a short time. This idea is utterly foolish and if he does not think so, let him come and learn in the school that all fools have to learn in. The day for quick fortune-making is over in this country. The richest mines have all been discovered and worked out.

I hope no one will be so green as to be misled by the big gold stories that he may see going the rounds in the newspapers, especially if they are extracts from papers printed in this country; for I can assure him, and bring thousands of witnesses to prove what I say, that they are in ninety nine instances out of a hundred, false. There are thousands of men now in California who would gladly go home if they had the money ...

"Boone Emigrant"

Missouri Statesman, Apr. 25, 1851

California, the Garden Spot of the World

California, Nov. 10, 1850

I like the climate of California, and think the soil well adapted to the raising of wheat, barley, oats, and nearly every kind of winter crops; and even corn will grow in the bottoms without watering. It is one of the finest countries for raising vegetables, and all kinds of tropical fruits in the world; and the valleys of the San Joaquin and San Puebla, produce the finest grapes and fruits of all kinds, except apples, that I have ever seen; oranges, figs, and almonds grow in great abundance. It is a very fine country for stock raising of every kind. Hogs keep as fat here as they would in a corn field,
on grass, and inexhaustable quantities of acorns from live oaks and of other kinds of oaks. The trees look like they could hardly bear up under the weight while the ground beneath them is covered. The valleys of the San Joaquin, San Puebla, San Jose, &c., are said to be the most delightful country in the world, with a climate unsurpassed by that of Italy. And taking the climate of California, and a large proportion of its soil, I think it is the garden spot of the United States, if not of the world; and when the society becomes once settled, and its citizens turn their attention from mining to agriculture, (as they must do in a short time) and when law and government shall take place of riots and mobs, I think in no portion of the world, could man spend his time more pleasantly than here.

A. M. Williams, to his father,
Missouri Courier, quoted by the St. Joseph Adventure, Feb. 21, 1851

VII. METHODS OF MINING GOLD, 1848-49

Methods of Mining Gold, 1848

Californy [sic], Dec. 18, 1848

In the sand the gold is generally sought for near the current, and in the current, and in the rocks we look for it in vain. There is one kind of deposit they call a pocket. The pocket is generally found in the natural breeches of the mountain, and can be dug into with a pick. The miners who work these deposits are known as the pic-pocket gangs. In the sand the preshus [sic] mettle is found in grains and gobs. Some say that the gobs is not the real stuff, and that nobody can tell what's what until the essayer has crucified it; others say that proosic [sic] acid will tell the story ...

“A Disbanded Volunteer” to the “Sundy Times”
St. Joseph Adventure, Apr. 27, 1849

Methods of Working the Mines, 1849

Sutter's Mill, Aug. 20, 1849

The machines of the country are still the rude rocker, or common tin pans, which the miners purchase at the price of eight dollars a piece.

We have not commenced work yet. We have been engaged in “prospecting” and preparing our machine. Our machine is one of the best in the country; it was made at home by Mr. Wills, an experienced miner.

W. B. Royall
Missouri Statesman, Oct. 26, 1849

Puffing and Blowing in the Mines

Dry Diggins City, Oct. 25, 1849

I am amused very much every day at the maiden efforts of the green 'uns
California Emigrant Letters

who come across the Isthmus and around the Horn, at gold hunting. They puff and blow like young whales; their hands soon blister; they bespatter themselves with yellow mire; occasionally they slip up, and souse their seats of humor into a cold bath — at all of which they make all sorts of comical wry faces. Now, the overland chaps go at things philosophically [sic], and nobody knows but they are old miners. The little mud does not frighten them; their hands are as tough as boards, and mining is fun to them compared to wading whole days knee deep in sand, or up rocky steps, lines, or whip in hand, without "a drop of water to cool their parched tongues," or a spear of grass to feed their weary, half-famished cattle.

"Mifflin" to the St. Louis Reveille, quoted by St. Joseph Adventure, Feb. 8, 1850

"Dry" and "Wet" Mining

Dry Diggings, Oct. 18, 1849

This is called "Dry Diggings" because there is a scarcity of water in this ravine. Some springs are found, and by damming [sic] up the water an opportunity is afforded at different places for the washing process to go on; but not with the same facility as the "Wet Diggings," or where there is a constant running creek or river. In this vicinity, however, there must be between four and five thousand persons engaged in digging, trading in provisions, goods, etc. The gold is mostly found at the bottom of the ravine, on the rock, and in the crevices as though it had been brought down the steep hill sides by heavy rains and deposited promiscuously along the beds of all the ravines. Therefore the finding of gold — a subject of the first importance here and elsewhere! — is not alike to all. One man may find a fortune within a few feet of another who finds very little. Yet there is no discouragement. There are other places, and plenty of them, for the unfortunate to continue his efforts. His time will certainly come if he will persevere.

In many places the business of mining is rather heavy. The rock has to be thrown out of the holes sunk from the depth of one to ten feet; the dirt thrown up with a spade, and where the water is not at hand, the dirt has to be carried in a sack on the miner's shoulder the distance, frequently, of a fourth of a mile to water. This is only the case, however, in the Dry Diggings — the washing on the rivers is different. There the bars only are looked into. Water being plenty the washing is easier, though a great deal must be washed and frequently for very little gold. Yet [this] is said to be more certain business than digging in the ravines, as there is more or less gold mixed in the sand on all the bars of the rivers.

Simeon Switzer, to his son
Missouri Statesman, Jan. 25, 1850
In order to give you some idea of mining in this beautiful country you must imagine yourself a miner. Well, tie your blankets, knapsack fashion on your back; that accomplished, get your cradle next, not any of our modern cots (I think they call them) but the old fashioned cradles that you and I were rocked in; put that on top of your blankets; next a pick and shovel and pan, coffee pot, some provisions in the shape of flint bread and (the cause of scurvy) pork; straighten yourself, take your rifle in hand and off you go rejoicing! This is what we call “prospecting,” you travel over some of the worst mountains I ever saw, so stupendous are they that it is the labor of extreme toil to ascend them. I must remark here that all the mines are in the mountains, on the water courses, ravines and gulches. You come to a ravine, take off your rigging, dig a hole from four to eight feet square and from three to six feet deep, you come to the bed rock where the gold is usually deposited, you find that your labor was all in vain.—You dig another hole and another, and find some gold, wash out some dirt as we call it; you find when you wash out about one hundred buckets full, perhaps five dollars; more commonly three; that will not pay; curse the gulch and your own hard fate, then your reflections are soothing in the extreme. You next gather some grass if you want to indulge a little in luxury, and make your bed; make a fire, eat your flint bread and pork, a little coffee without sugar, smoke your pipe and go to your blankets, where you will sleep sound. I can assure you gold digging makes a man sleep well. You awake in the morning, your head white, not with the frosts of many winters, but with the frost of a single night; jump up from your couch, shake yourself and you are dressed... Now you are determined to try the river, and attach yourself to some mere roving vagabonds you meet with, we call them the forlorn hope. Hope in this country loses all those beautiful charms upon which the mind so often and so fondly dwells. I digress: Well, you determine to turn the river, the company go to work, dig a race, which is the work of many days for many hands. Next make your dam to turn the water from the bed of the river, and when it is properly drained you go to work to dig the bed of the stream, buoyed with hopes. You pick, shovel and wash and get nothing. So it was on the bed of the Yuba, to my own knowledge, about the same time this fellow in Sacramento wrote this falsehood. I can assure you, sir, that twenty-one races were dug on this river, (Yuba) by different companies who had some capital, and nineteen of them paid nothing, the other two did not pay expenses...

James Heren
Missouri Statesman, May 16, 1851

(To be concluded)