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A CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH LETTER FROM
BERNARD J. REID

Edited by
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The America of the 18th and 19th centuries produced numerous
men of intellectual ability who were also, when the occasion
arose, men of action. In our own time of intense specializa-
tion, these individuals of an earlier day, who, in the Renaissance
tradition of the "complete man," boasted a number of varied accom-
plishments, have a special interest, a certain glamor. Among this
company may be mentioned a colorful local figure, Bernard Joseph
Reid (1823-1904), who was teacher, surveyor, lawyer, soldier, and
for a period in his youth, a seeker after adventure in the California
Gold Rush of 1849. Known chiefly as a lawyer who practiced prin-
cipally in Clarion County and Pittsburgh, he was also interested in
history and was an active member of the Historical Society of
Western Pennsylvania during the latter part of his life. The editors
wish to present here a portion of his own contribution to the
chronicle of the great Gold Rush—a letter which he appended to
the unpublished diary of his journey across the continent.¹ The

¹ A copy of this diary has been deposited with the Historical Society of Western
Pennsylvania, 4338 Bigelow Boulevard, Pittsburgh 13, Pennsylvania. Another
diary which Reid kept in California and which covered his life there during
the ten month period from January to October, 1850, was published in the
Pony Express Courier, Placerville, California, IV, No. 5 (October, 1937), 9-10,
13, 16, a copy of which is also on file in the society's library.
publication of the letter will at least serve to indicate the existence of the whole document, a vivid and dramatic narrative which deserves to be more widely known.

Reid,² son of Meredith and Eleanor Hanlon Reid,³ was born in Youngstown, Westmoreland County, and from his father who was a pioneer teacher and surveyor he acquired some knowledge of mathematics and civil engineering. Educated in the subscription and common schools of the vicinity and at St. James's Academy, Brown County, Ohio, he himself began to teach at the age of sixteen in the district school of Pleasant Unity in his native county. At seventeen, he walked to Pittsburgh and procured employment as a clerk in a Market Street dry goods store, but he also taught for a time in local schools. Later he went to Clarion, Pennsylvania, where he organized and taught a select or private school. About 1843 he founded with his brother, and edited, *The Iron County Democrat* (which yet survives as the *Clarion Democrat*), but he retired from the newspaper in 1845 when he was elected Clarion County Surveyor, the only civil office he ever held.

About this time he began to study law,⁴ but in 1847 he accepted a position as examining clerk in the office of the United States Surveyor General at St. Louis, Missouri, where he remained until April 1849, when he began his journey to the California gold fields. In California he was engaged in mining and trading until 1851, when he became professor of English, Spanish, history and mathematics at Santa Clara College near San Jose.⁵ He remained there until the fall of 1852 when he decided to return to "the States,"⁶ by way of the Isthmus of Panama. He resumed his law studies in Clarion

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² The biographical details given here are taken from the following sources: Report of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Bar Association Held at Bedford Springs, Pa., June 27, 28 and 29, 1905 (Philadelphia, 1905), obituary of Reid on pp. 108-110; A. J. David (ed.), History of Clarion County, Pennsylvania (Syracuse, N. Y., 1887), biographical sketch of Reid on pp. 379-398: Commemorative Biographical Record of Central Pennsylvania (Chicago, 1898), biographical sketch of Reid on pp. 1379-1380; an obituary in *The Pittsburgh Legal Journal* (21 December, 1904); various obituaries in Pennsylvania and California newspapers.

³ His parents were natives of Ireland who emigrated in 1817, settling in Westmoreland County.

⁴ Blackstone's *Commentaries*, which he had read half through at Clarion, were carried with him on his trip across the continent. See 1849 Diary, 37.

⁵ Santa Clara College, now the University of Santa Clara, was founded in 1851 on the site of the Mission of the same name. Reid was a member of the original faculty.

⁶ California was part of the territory ceded by Mexico to the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. California was admitted to the Union as a state in September, 1850, but even then it seems to have been the popular idiom to refer to the East as "the States."
and in December 1853 he was admitted to the bar in that city where he practiced for many years. In 1854 he married Letitia Farran, daughter of a Pittsburgh merchant.

In this centennial year of the Civil War, the part that he played in the great conflict is of some interest. He recruited Company F, 63rd Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers,7 a regiment commanded by Colonel Alexander Hays.8 He was commissioned captain and took part in McClellan's campaign in the Peninsula and, among other engagements, in the Seven Days' Battles around Richmond,9 during a portion of which Captain Reid was in command of the regiment due to the illness of Colonel Hays. Because of illness and press of business he was forced to resign his commission in August 1862, and returned to private life for a time. In July 1863, during the invasion of Pennsylvania, he recruited Company D, 57th Pennsylvania Militia, in which he was also commissioned captain,10 being soon promoted to major and regimental commander. He served with this regiment in the pursuit and subsequent capture of General Morgan, the famous raider.11

After the regiment was mustered out, he returned to Clarion, where he shortly became a partner in the firm of Reid and Patrick. He moved to Titusville, Pennsylvania, in 1871 and in 1874 to Erie, in both of which places he practiced law, but he returned in 1877 to Clarion, which was then the center of an oil producing field.

7 Gilbert Adams Hays (comp.), Under the Red Patch; Story of the 63rd Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers (Pittsburgh, 1908), 338-349.
8 Alexander Hays (1819-1864) was a native of Franklin, Pennsylvania, who graduated from West Point and served in the Mexican War. He also took the overland route to California in 1849, but he returned to Pittsburgh in 1851. His experiences are described in his surviving correspondence with his wife. He served with distinction during the Civil War and was killed in the Battle of the Wilderness. For his California experiences, see George T. Fleming, The Life and Letters of Alexander Hays (Pittsburgh, 1919), 98-112.
9 The Peninsular Campaign extended from March to July of 1862. The Seven Days' Battles took place at Oak Grove (25 June), Mechanicsville (26 June), Gaine's Mill (27-28 June), Garnett's and Golding's Farms (27-28 June), Savage's Station and Allen's Farm (29 June), White Oak Swamp (30 June) and Malvern's Hill (1 July, 1862). Some of these engagements are known under other names.
10 Commemorative Biographical Record of Central Pennsylvania (Chicago, 1898), 1379.
11 John Hunt Morgan (1825-1864) was commissioned in 1861 and given a squadron of Confederate cavalry for scouting purposes. He conducted raids into Federal territory in 1862 and 1863, rising rapidly in rank with his successes. On his last raid into Ohio, he was captured near New Lisbon, Ohio. He was imprisoned but escaped and was finally killed by Federal troops at Greensville, Tennessee, in September, 1864.
After the admission to the bar of his son, Ambrose B. Reid,12 the firm of B.J. and A.B. Reid was formed, which continued until the removal of the latter to Pittsburgh, when the elder Reid took as partner F.J. Maffett, constituting the firm of Reid and Maffett.

Reid had a considerable reputation as a trial lawyer, his most important early commission being the defense in 1860 of Charles Curtis, alias Logue, the first person ever tried for murder in Clarion County. He was a leading counsel for the defense in the prosecution of the officers of the Standard Oil Company for conspiracy in Clarion County in 1879. He had been admitted to practice before the Supreme Court in 1875.

In 1900 he moved to Pittsburgh and on his admission to the Allegheny County Bar in the same year, he became associated with the firm of Waterson and Reid. He died in Pittsburgh on November 15, 1904.

In addition to his membership in the Historical Society, he was a member of the Society of the Army of the Potomac and the Society of California Pioneers13 and was active in religious, educational and charitable work. Something of a linguist, he had a good command of German, French, and Spanish, as well as the classical languages. He was throughout his life a devout Roman Catholic and a redoubtable defender of his Faith.

That he possessed no small literary ability, the letter published here and the diary bear witness. He was gifted with narrative powers of some distinction and a sure dramatic sense which give a certain vitality to the various incidents he recounts. Perhaps due to his training as a surveyor, his account of the country through which the wagon train passed is sharply observed and, on occasion, he displays some knowledge of geology. His style is spare, but vivid, refreshingly free both of 19th century clichés and the formality that might have attended the re-working of his youthful story. The diary is especially notable for his landscape descriptions, which display a poetic, almost a sensuous delight in his surroundings. The panorama that constantly unfolds through these pages—the architectural rock formations, the fields of alkali, a sudden storm on the

12 Ambrose B. Reid (1857-1941) was from 1933 to 1937 president judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County. An active member of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, he was elected trustee of the organization in 1932 and 1935 and vice-president in 1933.
13 Reid joined the Society of California Pioneers in August, 1886, in the course of making his first visit to that area since his departure in 1852. (Letter from the Society of California Pioneers to the editors dated 6 July, 1961.)
prairies, the great peaks looming on the edge of a plain—all arouse in him a sense of joy which he communicates easily to the reader.14 There is in these lyrical paragraphs something of the shining wonder and morning grace of Willa Cather’s descriptions of the middle and far west.

Many unpublished diaries of the Gold Rush exist, but this one seems to be unrecorded.15 Unfortunately, the original manuscript has disappeared and it seems to be lost beyond the most diligent enquiry of the editors. The surviving typewritten document was left to the author’s son, Judge Ambrose Reid, and by him to his sons, B. Meredith and Alfred D. Reid, from whom the editors procured it. As we know it today, the text is a re-working of the material in Reid’s youthful journal (as certain emendations would indicate)—the new version of which was undertaken by Reid during a stay in a Pittsburgh hospital and which was put in final form in 1904. Anna Graham, an old family friend of the Reids, was a patient in Mercy Hospital at the same time and she witnessed the composition of the new manuscript from the original, so that even in the absence of the primary documents, we do have reliable evidence that they existed.16 The letter here published which was not, of course, part of the diary must have been either the original or a copy, which probably shared the same fate as the diary notes.

Reid’s westward journey began April 28, 1849 when he left St. Louis for Independence, Missouri,17 on a river steamer. He had purchased for two hundred dollars a ticket from Turner, Allen and Company of St. Louis,18 as one of one hundred twenty passengers on a “Pioneer Train” to El Dorado, the gold fields of California, and beyond to San Francisco. The fare included rations and a seat in one of twenty square-topped spring wagons as well as transport for 100 pounds of baggage for each member of the all male party. The freight was transported in the familiar hooped “prairie schooners.” The trip had been advertised as taking fifty-

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14 He also wrote poetry on occasion. There is extant a poem on the subject of the Yosemite which was published in the San Francisco Bulletin.
17 This town on the Missouri River was one of the principal starting points for travelers on the overland routes to the West.
18 One of several speculative concerns which sprang up to cater to the large number of westward travelers at this period. They often advertised traveling times which were completely unrealistic.
five to sixty days, and the total train consisted of forty-two wagons, three hundred mules, and one hundred sixty-one men including the crew and train captain, John Turner.19

The route which the Turner and Allen train followed corresponded closely to that which was to be christened by its users the "California Trail." At several points along the route there existed alternate paths which could be followed. From Independence to Fort Laramie20 and beyond to Soda Springs, the road they followed had been known before as the Oregon Trail.21 From there onward the road led to the gold fields.

The train left the camp grounds to the west of Independence on the 8th of May, proceeding westward to a ferry crossing of the Kansas River and then northwesterly until the Platte River was intercepted just above ninety-mile-long Grand Island and Fort Kearney.22 At the forks of the Platte the train took the "Lower California Crossing" of the South Platte and then struck across to intercept the North Platte at Ash Hollow. Beyond Fort Laramie the North Platte was ferried and the trail followed the Sweetwater River past Independence Rock up to South Pass23 where they crossed the Continental Divide on the 19th of July. At the Little Sandy River the trail forked, the Reid party taking the more northern

19 Principal in the above firm, his avarice caused death and suffering to the passengers on his train, due to his failure to provide them with proper rations.
20 Fort Laramie was situated in Wyoming at the junction of the Bozeman and Old Oregon Trails on the Laramie River near its confluence with the North Fork of the Platte. Established in 1834 as a trading post of the American Fur Company, it was bought in 1849 and garrisoned with Federal troops who maintained it until 1890 when it was sold. It was perhaps the most famous of the stopping places on the overland route and it is mentioned in most 19th century chronicles of western travel.
21 The trail which Reid's train followed from Independence, Missouri, to Soda Springs on the Bear River in Idaho was, from 1832 to 1845, the main route to Oregon. Other "Oregon Trails" originated from St. Joseph, Missouri, Council Bluffs, Iowa, and points in between along the Missouri River. These other branches all joined the main trail at or before Fort Laramie. Beyond Fort Hall (see map), the Oregon Trail and the California Trail separated.
22 Fort Kearney, formerly Fort Childs, was situated on the south bank of the Platte River opposite the present site of Kearney, Nebraska. The first Fort Kearney was a blockhouse established in 1846-47 on the Missouri River at what is now Nebraska City, but in 1848 it was moved to the present site to give more protection to travelers on the Oregon Trail. It was abandoned as an army post in 1871.
23 South Pass, first journeyed through by Robert Stuart in 1812, crosses the Rocky Mountains in southwestern Wyoming. It is so called because it lies far south of the pass through the Bitterroots used by Lewis and Clark in 1806. It consists of a twenty-mile-wide plain with a barely perceptible rise to its apex on the Continental Divide. Elevation 6500 feet.
route known as Sublette’s Cut-off\textsuperscript{24} which crossed the Big Sandy and the Green River and rejoined the older trail along the Bear River. The latter, a longer route, went by Fort Bridger\textsuperscript{25} where a road went on to Salt Lake City.

The track of Reid’s party followed the Bear River northward and at Soda Springs again took the newer road known as Hudspeth’s Cut-off. The older route went by Fort Hall\textsuperscript{26} and followed the Snake River to its tributary, the Raft River. Here the roads to California and Oregon finally parted, the California trail turning up the Raft River and meeting the Cut-off near its headwaters. Here also the road westward from Salt Lake City joined the main route.

Beyond the Raft River the train followed the Goose River and Thousand Springs Creek to the headwaters of the Humboldt River where the most arduous portion of the journey began. The trail was choked with alkali, the animals were exhausted and the men of the party were beginning to suffer greatly from the inadequate diet forced upon them by Captain Turner. The train finally reached the Carson River after a desert march from Humboldt Sink in the course of which Reid and four others left the train with a pack-horse to cross the Sierras alone, not caring to wait until the remnants of the exhausted train could attempt the journey. On September 18, they crossed Carson Pass\textsuperscript{27} and three days later reached the “diggings” on Weber’s Creek.\textsuperscript{28} After a short and unsuccessful venture at gold mining, and with the arrival of the wagon train, Reid went on to Sacramento where he caught a sailing ship for

\textsuperscript{24} For Sublette’s Cut-off and Hudspeth’s Cut-off (below), see map. The former, sometimes called Greenwood’s Cut-off, was an alternate to the Fort Bridger route. Hudspeth’s Cut-off, also called Myer’s Cut-off, was opened to wagon travel in August, 1849. Although it was ninety miles shorter than the road by Fort Hall, it was an extremely difficult trail for wagons.

\textsuperscript{25} Fort Bridger, located on Black’s Fork of the Green River in Wyoming, was established in 1842 by Jim Bridger (1804-1881), guide, mountain man and trader, who discovered the Great Salt Lake in 1824. Burned in 1857, the fort was subsequently rebuilt and used until 1890 as a military post guarding the overland stage route and the Union Pacific surveying crews.

\textsuperscript{26} Owned by the Hudson Bay Company, Fort Hall stood on the left bank of the Snake River in Idaho and closely resembled Fort Laramie but on a smaller scale.

\textsuperscript{27} Carson Pass (elevation 8600 feet) over the main range of the Sierras south of Lake Tahoe, was found by Captain John Frémont and “Kit” Carson in the winter of 1843-44 while looking for a direct route to California from the East. It was used by thousands of gold-seekers.

\textsuperscript{28} Weber’s Creek diggings, twenty-five miles from Placerville on Weber’s Creek, was named for Captain Charles M. Weber who came to California in 1843 and maintained a store there for a time. He was later to found Stockton, California.
San Francisco. It was October 21, 1849, when he and seven others of the original party arrived in that city. They had left their camp near Independence, Missouri, one hundred sixty-five days before.

The following is a transcription of a letter written by Bernard J. Reid to his sisters in Clarion, Pennsylvania, dated three days after his arrival at the end of his journey.

San Francisco, California,
Oct. 24, 1849.

My Dear Sisters:

Thank God! I have outlived the long journey here, though it has been fatal to very many of my poor fellow-passengers. At last I find myself arrived at my destination safely and in good health. It has seemed a long, long time since I left the homes of civilized men in the valley of the Mississippi until I arrived among them once more on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. But the journey is over and I am thankful for my safety. I landed on Sunday evening,—and Monday morning sought out the post office to obtain letters from home that I felt assured had long awaited me there. I got John's and Kate's, forwarded from St. Louis, also Uncle's from Pittsburg and yours both, and Ellen's. I received, too, one from Larry from St. Louis. I had hoped to get other letters from home of later date, but unfortunately the last two steamers brought no letters or mail at all. Much to my regret, also, I learned at the office that newspapers were not kept on hand at the post office longer than a month,—so I have lost my files of Pittsburg and St. Louis papers, which would have been of great interest to me away out here. You may guess how glad I was to hear from you,—of your good health and happy home. After the long, dreary, cheerless trip, how refreshing to my spirits was a feast like that of those fond epistles! Well, how am I to answer them? Shall I tell of the journey or of this far-famed land? Of the latter I know but little yet; of the former I know too much, almost, to tell. When I now look back upon it, it appears like a long, dreadful dream from which I have just awakened. As to the "Pioneer Line" we were all

29 The addressees of the letter are Reid's sisters, Mary Cecelia and Catherine, known as Kate. John was Reid's brother and Ellen was his foster-sister, Ellen M. Findley. The uncle from Pittsburgh was the Reverend James Reid, founder of St. James Academy, Brown County, Ohio.
grievously deceived, (unintentionally perhaps), by the press and the leading merchants of St. Louis. It proved an infamous imposture; its proprietors swindlers and worse than that, criminals of the deepest die,—for the deaths of several men and the tears of widows and orphans are the consequence of their bad faith, cupidity and inhumanity. When I wrote home from Fort Kearney, Fort Laramie and Big Sandy, a portion only of their villainy [sic] had been developed. The worst came last. The wayside over the deserts of the Great Basin,—the rugged passes of the Sierra Nevada,—and the descent into the valley of the Sacramento, are marked by the graves of the wretched victims of the “Pioneer Line.” Instead of getting through comfortably in 60 or 80 days, the train was 165 days on the road from Independence to this city,—and only 8 out of 120 passengers came through! The others, who did not die on the road, left the train to save their health and their lives. We were more than decimated,—eighteen having died on the way in the train. When our supply of provisions gave out Turner bought nothing for us but salt, fat bacon and inferior flour; no sugar no rice, no vinegar, no saleratus, no ca,—not even a grain of salt, although he had frequent opportunities of doing so. Passengers for awhile purchased some of these things, till their means were generally expended: and were then obliged to fall back upon the miserable food furnished by Turner, worse far than that given to convicts in any State Prison. Diarrhoea, dysentary [sic] and scurvy were the consequence. Twenty or thirty were continually sick. The condition of things became so bad and our progress was so slow that I thought it best to abandon the train and risk the balance of the journey on foot to the nearest settlement. Five of us started together, packing our provisions and blankets on our backs. We were then on the Sandy Desert, between Mary’s and Carson Rivers,—our teams had all given out,—all the baggage wagons had to be left 18 miles from water—the carriages were got a little further, but had at last to be left 12 miles from the river. All the passengers too sick to wade through the sand were left with the carriages.

30 The “post-office” by the Big Sandy River consisted of a cleft stick which held letters until someone traveling eastward would take it upon himself to carry them back. See 1849 Diary, 40.
31 The meaning seems to be “salted fat bacon.”
32 The word in the original is not decipherable.
33 The Mary’s River is a headwater tributary of the Humboldt River and its name was sometimes given by travelers to the main stream. It is used here in the latter sense.
The Route of Reid’s "Pioneer Train"
Alternate Routes on the California Trail
The Oregon Trail

The Overland Routes in 1849
There they were left, with no water except that of a salt well, for three days. A few canteens of fresh water were, however, carried back to them by some of the passengers. When the baggage wagons were first left we five determined to start ahead. Brewster and I still had the pony. We selected some of our baggage to pack through on "Don" as we called him. The rest of our baggage we expected never to see again. We took five days' provisions with us, depending for the balance upon our chance of purchasing from trains that we might overtake. Once across the desert to Carson River, we had about 250 miles to traverse before reaching the first settlement near Sutter’s Fort. Of this, 100 miles were up the river and about 90 thence across the mountains. I carried about 25 pounds on my back and we averaged about 25 miles a day. It was hard work, but better than remaining in the train. Some nights we would camp with a train, other nights we would find none, in which case we would build a fire and keep watch by turns. The nights in the mountain region were very cold, but the days were generally warm. On the summit of the Sierras, which was very high, we passed banks of snow ten feet deep. It was an awful road for wagons to pass over. We found numberless deserted ones strewn all along, both on the desert and the mountain. We got along pretty well. Nine days’ travel brought us to the Weber’s Creek diggings and village, 50 miles from Sutter’s. Oh! how glad a sight it was to see log houses and rows of tents and other evidences of the abode of man. It was such a novelty to sit down on chairs to a meal spread on a table and under a shelter, it seemed well worth the dollar it cost.

Next morning I saw them at work digging out gold. No mistake,—it was the pure article. Gracious! how they had dug and scarred the face of Mother Earth in seeking for the glittering grains. But all were not Alladins [sic]. While some realized from two to three ounces a day, others were scarcely making a living, and all were working equally hard. Before I try my luck I must go back and

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34 Dr. John A. Brewster had accompanied Reid to California as a partner-in-fortune. Reid originally met him in 1847 while journeying to St. Louis. "Don" was a mustang pony from Chihuahua, Mexico, purchased by Reid in St. Louis.

35 Traffic along the California Trail was so heavy that there was generally no more than a day's march (seventeen miles on the average) separating wagon trains. It is estimated that fifty thousand persons made the overland journey in the season of 1849.

36 Sutter's Fort lay on the outskirts of present-day Sacramento. It was a stockade built by John A. Sutter (originally John Augustus Suter) on lands acquired by him in 1839. It served as a center for all activities relating to his holdings.

37 Carson Pass. See footnote No. 27.
tell something more of the train. A hundred miles beyond the South Pass our teams were completely broken down. We saw we could never get through without some change. We accordingly agreed to sacrifice our baggage and lighten up the train. Each man was limited thenceforth to 75 pounds, everything included. I threw away, consequently, more than half my outfit, which was considerable loss. Soon after leaving Independence I began to find that Dr. Brewster was not quite the person to suit me. A trip on the plains develops [sic] character most completely. I soon resolved to separate from him quietly before reaching California. We divided our affairs about equally. We valued pony and trappings at first cost and drew lots for him, the winner to buy out the other's share and also to carry on the pony, to Sutter's Fort, an equal share of baggage for each. Brewster won "Don." When we reached Weber's Creek Don was well nigh given out for want of feed. Here I relieved him of my share of his load, concluding to stop there awhile to rest, and perhaps to dig a little while before the train came up. In a day or two I bought a pick and pan and went to work. The former cost $7.00. Tin pans also sell for the same, but I got a second-hand one cheaper. I had not money enough to buy a shovel, so had to borrow one till I could dig some. I had to pay $18 a week for board, with the privilege, literally, of sleeping under a tree. No such a thing as shelter. The roofed huts are all used for stores and grog-shops. Well, I dug one week pretty hard and, after buying a shovel, lacked $8 of paying my board. The next week I did better but did not get more than gold enough to pay for the week's board. I sold my digging tools for two-thirds of cost and, the train having arrived, I prepared to come on to Sacramento City.38 Flour sold at the diggings for 37c per pound; pork or bacon 62½c; potatoes $1 per pound; onions $1.50; grapes $1.25; cabbage $1 a head; cheapest molasses $1 a quart; other things in proportion. At Sacramento prices were generally lower but, on account of the enormous rents, I had to pay $21 a week for board with the privilege of spreading my blanket on the floor. No one can travel in this country without his blanket. Lodging costs more than board and can hardly be had. Sacramento is a large place doing an immense business, and only a few months' growth. It is on the east bank of

38 Sacramento City was named by José Mesager, Commandante of the Presido of San José. In 1848 the town was laid out on Sutter's farm. The city mushroomed rapidly during the Gold Rush and became the capital of the state in 1854.
the Sacramento River, just below the mouth of the American, and two miles from Sutter's Fort, which is now turned into a hotel and hospital. On the river bank is a strip of timber nearly a mile wide, chiefly of large branching oaks, the noblest I ever saw. Right in this timber is the city, few of the oaks being cut away. Their trunks are far apart but their branches interlock, forming a delightful shade. Beneath and among these trees are the houses, sheds and tents composing the city, ranged in regular streets, blocks, etc. "The St. Louis Exchange," the best hotel in the place, at which I put up while there, was under an arm of one of these oaks and the sign swung from a limb. But the oddest sight was the shipping at the wharf which, to an observer at a little distance, seemed to mingle its many masts and spars with the living timber on shore. It was a novel sight, at any rate to me who never saw any shipping before. Barques, brigs, schooners, sloops and all sorts of smaller craft came to this port,—being at the head of tide-water. Two or three small steamboats also ply between there and the port of San Francisco. The place has had a wonderful growth since Spring; but "the oldest inhabitant" says the site overflows every May,—and if the overflow should come everything would go afloat. On my way from Weber's Creek to Sacramento, I went around to Coloma,¹⁹ (Sutter's Mills) and saw the spot in the mill-race where gold was first accidentally discovered. I went on foot with my necessary pack on my back. My meals on the way cost from $1.25 to $1.50—some tolerably good—some rather indifferent. Everywhere there is a great lack of fruit and vegetables. Fresh beef is abundant and good. Fresh pork, mutton, veal, fish, etc., very dear. The change of diet from salt to fresh meat subjects nearly all the emigrants to a diarrhoea which is fatal to many. I did not escape it; it troubled me for two or three weeks, but finally ceased, leaving my system perfectly healthy and sound. In fact I have better health now and am more robust than when in St. Louis. I weigh eleven pounds heavier than when I started and am one of the two or three passengers who have improved by the trip, throughout the whole of which I took no kind of spirits, (considered indispensable by many) and no medicine except one dose of oil. After my leaving the train was the worst time on the passengers. When I went to their camp at Weber's Creek I saw a great change. The well were sick—the

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¹⁹ Coloma (Sutter's Mills), on the South Fork of the American River, is famous as the place where James W. Marshall first discovered gold in the mill race of Sutter's sawmill in January, 1848.
sick were worse,—several were dead. Two of my messmates died. It made my heart sick to see the condition of the train. They had no flour, nothing but miserable pinola (parched corn) and bacon,—and Turner, with inhuman stinginess procured nothing for the passengers,—nothing even to relieve the sick. One of my messmates had managed to walk from camp to the village, to get something to relieve him, but was too weak to walk back again in the evening. He found no shelter and his bedding was at Camp. In his condition he was much worse in the morning from the exposure. When I found him there for the first time he was very much reduced; his limbs were stiff and painful, he could scarcely move and was little more than conscious. Touched at his pitiable condition I applied to Turner (whose carriage was in the village to take out provisions for himself) and begged of him to take out Mr. Duhring in his carriage to camp where his bedding was, and where his mess would take care of him. Turner refused to do so. I implored him for the sake of the man's life; he still refused, with curses! With difficulty, I got him taken out in an empty wagon the same day,—went out with him,—fixed his bed about him, and stayed awhile till he said he felt better and his messmates promised to take care of him. I found a friend of his at the diggings who undertook to carry out some food that would be good for him and, hoping to see him again at Sacramento, where he could get proper food and attention, started for Coloma. When his friend went out to camp early in the morning poor Mr. Duhring was no more. This is only one of many such scenes that have taken place in our ill-fated train. On relating a few facts respecting our train to the people at Weber's Creek they expressed their feelings so strongly that I almost feared they would assemble en-masse and hang John Turner. Certainly, had I but called a meeting there and made a simple statement of facts John Turner would have expiated his crimes with his life. But I believe there will yet come a day of retribution, and that not far distant.

At the diggings they have no law but lynch-law,—and I must say I have never lived in a more honest and peaceable community. There are no such things as bolts, bars or locks among them, yet scarcely an instance of theft is known. Baggage and property of all kinds is piled up and scattered about in the open air, and is not molested night or day. A year ago two or three men were hanged for theft near Weber's Creek. Perhaps that was a sufficient ex-
ample. No scenes of violence occur,—or at least nothing like as often as in the States among the same number of people,—and yet there is a great deal of drinking and a great deal of gambling. The latter vice prevails to an alarming extent and I notice that Americans are worse at it than Mexicans. The number of gambling houses in this city and Sacramento, and the large piles of gold and silver displayed on their tables, would seem almost incredible to you. Not one in twenty of the hotels, restaurants, bar-rooms or boarding houses but has its full dozen or more gaming tables groaning under piles of coin; and every allurement too, is made use of to attract a crowd. Music, refreshments, lights, paintings, handsomely furnished rooms, and the like, are some of the usual attractions. Even the harp, once ennobled and consecrated by sacred themes, is here prostituted to this unholy purpose. Betting at the gaming table has already been the ruin of many a young man who came here with high hopes and perhaps honorable enterprise. They were tempted, they bet,—they lost and the result was, in some instances that I have heard of, was suicide. Some suicides have happened too, from mere disappointments. Men were perhaps too sanguine, they went to the mines, labored harder perhaps than they ever had before,—got but little gold and great discomfort,—became discouraged, despondent, and finally terminated their lives by their own hands. Though society here is quiet and peaceable, if one could but see the hearts and read the minds of those around him, he would discover worlds of anxiety, troubles, disappointments and suffering.

The community here is peculiar, unique and unequalled in any age or clime. It will require years to temper it down and give it a feeling and tone like settled society elsewhere, but I am not qualified to tell you much about it now. I am too new a comer yet to be sufficiently acquainted either with the people or the country. By the next month’s steamer I will be able to write more fully on the subject. I have hardly yet awakened from my dream to see my position clearly and realize my situation and my feelings. It will require a few weeks of real life to bring me to.

*Monday Evening, Oct. 29th*

They have a rude building here used for a church on Sundays, and as a school house during the week. They are preparing to build a suitable church immediately. Today, when upon the hills above
the town, I heard the Angelus bells chiming at the Mission\(^40\) some five miles off. The sound lingered long and pleasantly in my ears. I must visit the Mission soon.

Well, to go back to the history of my trip. After staying two days in Sacramento before the train arrived, and two days after without doing anything, Turner engaged passage for eight of us on board of a schooner bound for this city. He took good care not to venture his own person or any of his property,—for there is no law here and justice is speedy in its operations. We glided down the beautiful, blue, still Sacramento River till we entered the bay, the first salt water I ever was on. The scenery was pretty and my impressions were new and interesting. The bay was not very rough; the wind was ahead, but we made the port by "beating and tacking" after a pleasant voyage of five days. The harbor was full of shipping of every size and from nearly all nations; and there on the hill-side before us lay the far-famed town of San Francisco, whose streets were said to be paved with gold. It is a more picturesque than eligible site for a city; a portion of the bay dips into the land in the shape of a crescent and circling around this curving beach is the business portion of the town, the back part of which rises by a rapid slope until it runs up into hills of considerable elevation. The buildings now extend some way up these hillsides and, when viewed from the bay at night, with their windows all illuminated it looks like a vast and beautiful amphitheatre. The buildings are nearly all frame-built in haste, and of a temporary character generally. There are, however, some of brick and some handsomely finished frames. Among these latter are several pretty cottages brought here by sea from the States. Rents are enormous. Some buildings are rented for $80,000 a year! A common rude, one-story building 20 by 60 feet brings from thirty to fifty thousand a year. If a bachelor hires a room for himself he has to pay $150 a month. If these are the rents merely, what think you would property itself be valued at? Only two or three years ago property could have been had for a few dollars that now commands many thousands. More have made large fortunes by the rise in property than by digging for gold,—and how much easier? You may judge from these things how much money must be in circulation here,—and all hard money too,—no rag currency at all.

40 Mission San Francisco de Asis, familiarly called Mission Dolores, was founded in 1776.
In so expensive a place it became necessary for me to get something to do as soon as possible. I had a companion in poverty and employment-seeking, Mr. Davidson*1 of Maryland, a fellow “Pioneer,” and a very clever young man. We kept looking about and inquiring for several days without success. There are so many disappointed young men constantly returning from the mines to look for situations in the city, that one has but a poor chance. At last I betook myself to my old-and only-trade, surveying. I had no instruments with me and had to be contented with the post of assistant, at the rate of $8 a day. I am employed by the city Surveyor and do not know how long he may need me. The work is on streets and town lots. I am contented with the place [position] at present, as it will at least enable me to pay my way should I not see a chance of doing better for the winter elsewhere. I get very good boarding for $14 a week at one of the very few public-houses that are not gambling shops. Washing costs $6 a dozen, but clothing is nearly as cheap as in St. Louis. Davidson was idle a day or two longer than I was, when he was so fortunate to get a horse and cart to do hauling with about town, for half the profits. He makes about $10 a day at it. The son of rich parents, slender and delicate, raised in ease and luxury, it is an odd situation for him, to drive car, but he bears himself like a philosopher. I saw Herron Foster*2 here; he is a clerk at the Alcalde’s*3 office. The Alcalde is an important personage here, being at once Mayor, Justice of the Peace and Judge of the Court. He has at his disposal the affairs of the city and the rights and lives of citizens. And who fills this office?

*1 J. M. Davidson was a companion in the wagon train who escaped death twice on the journey; once from cholera and a second time when he was rescued by Reid from drowning in the Platte River. See 1849 Diary, 13, 32.

*2 Another notable Pittsburgh Forty-Niner, James Heron (or Herron) Foster (1822-1868) was born in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. In 1846 he founded the *Pittsburgh Daily Dispatch* which later became one of the city’s important dailies. In February, 1849, he sailed for California by way of Cape Horn and arrived in San Francisco in August of the same year. The accounts of his journey and his stay in California were published in the *Dispatch* in the form of editorial letters during 1849 and 1850. According to his estimate, there were a large number of western Pennsylvania men in California at the time. He returned to Pittsburgh in 1850, later serving two terms in the Pennsylvania legislature. He also fought in the Civil War. See files of the *Daily Dispatch* for 1849 and 1850 and the obituary in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* for 22 April, 1868, 4.

Another account of the same era by a Pittsburgher may be found in William Graham Johnston’s *Experiences of a Forty-Niner* (Pittsburgh, 1892). Johnston (1828-1913) later became a prominent Pittsburgh businessman.

*3 An interesting governmental relic reminiscent of Spanish and Mexican rule and still useful in the transitional period between the regimes of Mexico and the United States.
Col. Geary\textsuperscript{44} of Westmoreland County, my glorious predecessor in charge of the McGinly School in Salem Township. If I get business enough, most likely I shall remain here during the winter.\textsuperscript{45}

\textit{Tuesday, Night, Oct. 31, [sic] 1849}

I have waited till the last moment for the expected backmails before closing my letter, but the steamer has not arrived, and the out-going mail closes tomorrow, so I must bring this letter to an end.

I do not feel like writing now, in the absence of the . . . . . . . \textsuperscript{46} . . . in the place,—so uncertain as to my future movements, and moreover, having so little time as I have. I only intend by this letter to let all of you know that I am alive and well. I am in good health, my spirits are buoyant and my feelings, I trust, "as fresh and warm" as ever. Do not fear for me. I am as safe from all harm here as I would be in St. Louis, Pittsburg, Clarion or Beaver. Besides, you must not be uneasy if you do not hear from me as regularly as you may expect. The mails are not to be depended on; witness the total failure of all mails from the States to this place for nearly three months. I suppose before you receive this, you must have given me up, so long will it be after you began to look for my letter.

I enclose you a specimen of gold dust,—the first that I dug. Some pieces have been found weighing several pounds, the largest I saw being worth $21. The gold lies on the surface and in the crevices of the rocks, and is generally found at a depth of 3 to 8 feet from the top of the ground. This upper earth has to be all

\textsuperscript{44} John White Geary (1819-1873) was later twice governor of Pennsylvania during the years 1867-73. Born near Mount Pleasant, Westmoreland County, he, like Reid, taught as a youth in the nearby district schools. He fought in the Mexican War and was appointed by President Polk, Postmaster of San Francisco in 1849. He was elected the first alcalde of that city and in 1850, became its first mayor. In 1855 he was appointed Governor of Kansas Territory by President Pierce but resigned in 1857. He had earlier declined an appointment as Governor of Utah Territory. He fought with distinction in the Civil War and was breveted Major General toward the close of the conflict. He died shortly after retiring from the Pennsylvania governorship. See \textit{Dictionary of American Biography} (New York, 1931), VII, 203-5, and various histories of Westmoreland County.

\textsuperscript{45} Reid continued his work for the City Surveyor until February, 1850. He then went into partnership with a friend, Robert Hawkshurst (or Hawnhurst), and they engaged in trading in and around Stockton, California. In July of that year he returned to mining in the Stanislaus River area, but without much success, and in the following year joined the faculty of Santa Clara College. See 1850 Diary in the \textit{Pony Express Courier}.

\textsuperscript{46} Here a line or two in the original have been obliterated.
dug and shoveled off, and the labor is very similar to well sinking or cellar digging. Those who come here expecting to pick up gold from the top of the ground, or wash it out from the loose sand of rivers, are bitterly disappointed. It requires bone and muscle, and tasks them severely, to succeed in getting gold. In this I am not at all disappointed.

I enclose also a cactus-flower, plucked on the wayside on the Great Prairie; it is a memento of the trip; its hues are yet bright, though it seems an age since I plucked it. I have many more such mementoes. Of the journey, I have yet a thousand things in store to tell you.

Your very devoted brother,

[Bernard J. Reid]