



# Ho for California! Caledonia County Gold Miners

*More than two hundred Caledonia County men and boys traveled to California to seek their fortune in the gold rush. Of the three well-documented groups, 72 percent returned to Vermont and of these 69 percent brought back earnings of at least \$300, much higher numbers than usually attributed to California miners. Their success can be traced to close family ties, strong religious beliefs, commitment to the network of friends from home, and Yankee work ethic.*

By LYNN A. BONFIELD

**G**old! Word of the discovery of gold in January 1848, along the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada Mountains, triggered unimaginable excitement everywhere it was repeated. People from all walks of life and all corners of the globe raced to California by sea and land to try their luck in the gold fields—all hoping to “strike it rich.” They hailed from Australia, China, Europe, the Sandwich Islands, Chile, Mexico, and Peru. Mainly though, they came from the eastern United States where most of the twenty-three million Americans of the time lived. For the most part this was a male adventure with family members left at home waiting for news from their wandering

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loved ones. Among the rush of men heading to California and imagined fortunes were more than two hundred from rural Caledonia County in northeastern Vermont.

Many of these American gold seekers, called Argonauts, recorded their experiences in letters written home. Some kept journals, day-by-day records of events, to share with family later and to serve as a reminder of their personal participation in this adventure. These eyewitness accounts penned during the California gold rush are outnumbered only by those produced during the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> Preserved letters and diaries written by Vermont's Caledonia County residents participating in the stampede for gold are from the Danville families of Ladd and Sanborn; the Hardwick family of Goodenough; the Peacham families of Clark, Martin, Way, and Walbridge; and the Walden family of Roberts. Some of these primary sources remain in private hands, and others are available in libraries and historical societies across the country.

In addition, Caledonia County newspapers, *The North Star* in Danville and *The Caledonian* in St. Johnsbury, published letters from the Argonauts. Historian J. S. Holliday credits these letters printed in local newspapers with fueling "a dynamic process by which the entire nation was emotionally involved in the rush to California."<sup>2</sup> The number of letters mailed from the West Coast was reported regularly in the press. On April 13, 1850, for instance, *The Caledonian* noted that the steamer *Cherokee* had landed in New York with "the mails from San Francisco . . . The letter mail contains 30,000 letters." In 1850 postage for a letter mailed from San Francisco to St. Johnsbury was eighty cents.<sup>3</sup>

The first Caledonia County newspaper mention of gold in California appeared in *The North Star* on September 25, 1848, nine months after its discovery.<sup>4</sup> Most newspapers, however, did not pick up the news until President James K. Polk sent his annual message to Congress on December 5, 1848, and announced to the world the "abundance of gold" in California. "The supply is very large," he reported, and "nearly the whole of the male population of the country [California] have gone to the gold fields."<sup>5</sup> The news was out.

The editor of *The Caledonian*, A. G. Chadwick, was quick to respond. He listed the high cost of going to California, the dangers, diseases, risks, and poor chance of return as problems facing prospective emigrants. Citing the history of such "excitements," he predicted doom: "In the periodical excitements of the world the proportion of the victims to the victors is about 100 to 1. It may not be in this case; it will be an anomaly in history if it does not turn out so."<sup>6</sup> *The Caledonian* rarely strayed from this pessimistic editorial perspective, but as exciting news sells papers, it printed reports from California in almost every issue for

the next five years. Danville's *The North Star* followed suit, although in contrast its message often encouraged Vermonters to go after their "golden dreams," even predicting that those accustomed to labor with the pick and shovel would achieve "the success they merit."<sup>7</sup>

By 1850 more than 11,000 Vermonters had reached California, ranking the state third in numbers of New England emigrants there, behind Maine and Massachusetts, both more heavily populated than Vermont.<sup>8</sup> Considering that Vermont's population was only 314,120 at the time, the number who headed to California is large. As for Caledonia County, its population was 23,609 with only three towns, St. Johnsbury, Danville, and Barnet, listing more than 2,000 people.<sup>9</sup>

Since the settlement of Caledonia County beginning in the 1770s, agriculture had been the main occupation of the area. By the late 1840s, the competition from the West, what became known as the Midwest, drove prices for the county's staple products down, especially wool and grain. At the same time, good farm land had become so high in price that young men starting out could not afford to purchase a farm, and men with mortgages had many years of hard work to look forward to before erasing their debt. In response, families moved west to new farms, a solution many Vermonters adopted in the 1840s. California gold also lured away men with the dual enticements of adventure and quick riches. When gold was discovered in California, sons of farmers who had reached the age of majority—twenty-one—and even long-time farmers dreamed of making "a pile," to use the common phrase of the time. Having to leave the comforts of home and travel great distances did not deter them from catching "gold fever" and starting out for California. A Hardwick man put it succinctly: "Times are hard and money tight . . . it is the hardest time for trade and all kind of Money business that it has ben for years . . . I for one am bound to leave old Caledonia."<sup>10</sup> Reasons other than making a fortune may have prompted some departures for California—simple curiosity, love of travel, desire to see the world, or getting out from under the control of a strict father and rigid community social constraints.

The names of those who left Caledonia County for California have been identified from family letters, diaries, newspaper accounts, and writings in books and journals. The earliest hopeful gold miner from the county appears to have been J. Jewett of St. Johnsbury, who raced to Boston in early 1849 to join a company called the "Bunker Hill." Consisting of 224 men, the group arrived in San Francisco in October after 208 days at sea. Jewett wrote home, "Arrived here in safety. No deaths and very little sickness occurred during the voyage."<sup>11</sup>

Other men with "the gold bug" traveled alone. One young man in January 1853 told his father he was going to Boston. After the train left

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Barnet, he changed his ticket to one for New York where he planned to board a steamer for California. Describing the situation in a letter, the surprised observer of this event added, "I did not understand whether he intended to deceive his friends or whether he changed his mind after he started."<sup>12</sup> Another lone sojourner, Russell K. Rogers, a native of Boltonville (later part of Ryegate), left his job as clerk in a store at Peacham Hollow. His one surviving letter was written from the mines on May 23, 1852: "I have been mining seven days made five dollars a day . . . I like mining as well as any work I could do it is hard enough but it gives me a good appetite and I feel as well as I ever did . . . [there is] any quantity of Vermonters round here."<sup>13</sup>

Most men did not go alone to California but took the trip with brothers, cousins, former school classmates, church members, or neighbors. Almost a dozen groups of men from Caledonia County have been identified as leaving for California between 1849 and 1853, the years historians consider the most important for the gold rush.<sup>14</sup> Most of these groups left little documentation. Those for which scarce information exists include four from Danville who left in January 1849,<sup>15</sup> ten from Barnet who left in February 1850,<sup>16</sup> thirteen from Hardwick who left in December 1851,<sup>17</sup> a dozen or so who left Danville, Peacham, and St. Johnsbury in fall 1852,<sup>18</sup> seven from Barnet who left New York in January 1853,<sup>19</sup> and three from Barnet leaving in April 1853.<sup>20</sup>



*Russell K. Rogers (1817–1886) left his store clerk position in Peacham in early 1852 to try his luck in the gold mines. He failed to make his “pile,” but upon returning to San Francisco, he married Clara Walbridge, and they settled permanently in California. This photograph of the clean-shaven young man was taken in San Francisco around 1854. Private collection.*

Among the steady stream of gold seekers leaving Caledonia County were three groups of men whose stories have been well recorded, especially in family letters. The focus of this article is the activities of the men in these well-documented groups. The first group, composed of eighteen men, left in early January 1850, more than a year after President Polk's announcement. A second group of twenty-four men left in October 1851. A third group, including six former Peacham Academy classmates and several others, followed ten weeks later in December 1851. All traveled many months and miles to reach the California gold mines.

### ROUTES TO CALIFORNIA

The trip was not an easy one. The first leg was by wagon or stage to the closest train departure point and on from there to the harbors at New York or Boston. From the Eastern ports, the gold seekers had a choice of sea routes. Some Vermonters made the sea voyage around Cape Horn, a distance of about 18,000 miles, which took, depending on the winds and currents around the Horn, from five to eight months. Others took the route via the isthmus at Panama, a distance of 2,000 miles on the Atlantic, about sixty miles across land, and another 3,500 miles on the Pacific. This trip took less than three months in 1849 and that duration steadily diminished as land travel improved. A small number of Vermonters chose to cross at Nicaragua, a shorter sea voyage but a longer land crossing. The disadvantage of either of the isthmus crossings was the cost, nearly double the expense of going around the Horn, but the advantage was the shorter length of the trip. All these sea routes put men in danger of catching tropical diseases and dying away from family and home.

Dreading crossing the vast plains on horseback or in wagons drawn by oxen, most Vermonters avoided the 3,000-mile overland route from Atlantic to Pacific coast. Norman Davis of Danville traveled to California by land in early 1849 and wrote his brother in Brooklyn, N.Y., in early April that "were I to start again, I should go via the Horn, by all means; for there you can sit quietly down and let the wind blow you along, and besides carry as much baggage as you please."<sup>21</sup> A front page story in *The Caledonian* on November 10, 1849, quoted a letter from William Moody of Newburyport, Massachusetts, who also had made the choice to travel overland. He advised "no one to undergo this route, for all the *gold* in California." Not everyone traveling to California by sea, however, found the experience endurable. A Peacham woman wrote in her diary in March 1852, "Henry Harrison and Samson have got home, having been as far as the isthmus & returned."<sup>22</sup>

The gold rush forced Vermonters to expand their knowledge of geography and to learn the pronunciation of new words. Early in 1849, *The Caledonian* printed a lesson suggesting “Panama should be accented on the last syllable, which is pronounced like *Ma*, when used as a substitute for mother. Attach the *n* to the first syllable. *Pan* is pronounced like the English word pan. Pan-a-mah.”<sup>23</sup>

#### THE EARLY STARTERS: MEN WHO LEFT CALEDONIA COUNTY IN JANUARY 1850

The first well-documented group of Caledonia County men who set off for the gold mines of California included a cohort of hopeful miners from Barnet, Danville, and Peacham. These twelve men signed a two-page contract on October 13, 1849, in Danville. Voluntary formal associations, such as this one, were common for New Englanders who anticipated that greater success would be possible if they worked together with men they knew. This 1849 contract spelled out in detail the purpose and arrangement:

Whereas an Expedition is contemplated to California for the purpose [of] obtaining Gold by mining or otherwise—

Therefore we whose names are hereunto subscribed do mutually agree to bind ourselves to and with each other, to depart for that Country as soon as practicable for the purpose before named—to spend two years at least in the undertaking each one of us to pay his own passage and contribute an equal proportion for the purpose of purchasing such mining utensils, tents, boats &c as shall be deemed necessary for the faithful and effective prosecution of our enterprises or adventure—& each of us bind ourselves to the other that we will render all necessary aid and assistance to any one of our Company whose misfortune it may be to become sick—and the expences of such sickness to be defrayed in equal proportions by each—

And it is further agreed that the proceeds of our labors shall belong to the whole of us jointly:—and at the expiration of this Contract the avails to be equally & justly distributed in equal shares to each of us—or on a call of a majority of this company a division of profits may be had once in 3 months—

And one wishing to dissolve his connection with the Company can do so by the voice of two thirds—and any one may be expelled from connection by the voice of two thirds—and in case of the discharge of any member of this Company either on his application or by vote as aforesaid a full settlement to be made with him; and his interest to be thereupon fully satisfied and discharged.<sup>24</sup>

The home towns of the twelve company members can be identified from town histories and genealogical records. Six members came from

Peacham: Harvey Blanchard, Seth W. Stuart, Bailey Watts, John Watts, John S. Way, and A. A. Wheeler; four from Danville: Chester Martin, John Martin, Isaac Stanton, Jr., and William Whittle; one from Barnet: Daniel Aiken; and one from Hardwick: Charles S. Martin.

Two sets of brothers signed the contract: John and Bailey Watts of Peacham and the Martin brothers, Chester and John of Danville and Charles of Hardwick;<sup>25</sup> and one set of brothers-in-law, Harvey Blanchard and Alexander Wheeler of Peacham. Seven of the signers were married. The oldest man in the company was John Watts at thirty-two; the youngest, his brother, Bailey Watts, at twenty. Most of the twelve gold seekers were twenty-five to thirty-two years of age.<sup>26</sup> Only one of the group, Harvey Blanchard, had attended the Caledonia County Grammar School, known as the Peacham Academy, but all had probably received an elementary education in the district schools. Caledonia County, with its long tradition of district schools, produced Argonauts who were literate, and many, if not all, wrote letters home.<sup>27</sup> Only Milton Blanchard, cousin of Harvey in this group, admitted that “he has never written home but once.”<sup>28</sup> Fortunately, his brothers, cousins, and townsmen did not follow his example.

According to 1849 town land records, three members of this company owned property before going to California: John Martin, Seth W. Stuart, and John S. Way. From town grand lists, official town records kept at the time recording the value of each man’s real estate and personal property, two of this company had money in the bank or in stocks: Harvey Blanchard and John S. Way.<sup>29</sup> These town records show that it was not only the poorest of men who left for California.

In early 1850, this California-bound company left for New York from Wells River by the rail line, which had reached there in November 1848. According to the journal kept by Chastina Walbridge Rix, sister-in-law of one of the group, her Peacham family on the Sunday morning of January 6, 1850, attended church and then “went over to the East Part, took tea with our folks and bade John S. Way, Goodbye.” Alfred S. Rix, Chastina’s husband, added to their journal, which was a joint effort:

The California Company started to day on their long & toilsome journey & labor. We have no hope that they will all, 18 in number, ever come back alive. But still we say, “Success to ye! Bet you’ll find more yellow things than gold—more blue ones than the sky.”<sup>30</sup>

Since mid-October the group had expanded from twelve to eighteen members. The added names were W.A.P. Blanchard known as Palmer Blanchard, Leverett Hand, Josiah Shedd, and James G. White of Peacham; Alex McLaren of Barnet; and James M. Walbridge of Marshfield.<sup>31</sup>

## JOHN WAY'S STORY

From this group, four letters by John S. Way have survived. All were addressed to his wife, Sarah Walbridge Way, in Peacham. The original copy of the California company contract was preserved with these letters in the Way family collection, perhaps indicating that John Way played a major role in organizing the group. John and Sarah had courted through most of 1849 and planned to marry when John returned from California, but the marriage date was moved up when Sarah became pregnant. The wedding took place only three days after John signed the California company contract—John was not going to give up his plans for California. They decided that Sarah would continue to live with her mother and stepfather at the Watts farm on Peacham's East Hill. Sarah's mother, Roxana Walbridge Watts, described this situation in a letter written after John's departure: "Mr Way Sallys man has gone to California . . . when she married him he was worth 15 hundred dollars in money but that did not satisfy and he must try his luck in C [California]."32

John Way was known to be a hard worker, having served as a hired hand on several farms, including the one owned by Sarah's stepfather, Lyman Watts. John was not a scholar, as good students at the time were labeled, and his limited education is evident in his letters. In the two letters describing the sea voyage, first on the Atlantic and later on the Pacific, he gave a lengthy list of the steamer's daily latitude and longitude, which probably had little meaning to his wife. He did admit that "we were all Sea Sick but John Watts Seth W Stuart and Harvy Blanchard was not much Sick." As for food, his opinion was that it "was not half as good as New England Hog's have." While crossing the Panama isthmus, he wrote, "it is hot enough to cook eggs if we could get them to rost." He set the stage with this lively description: "The Company is all in good health and Spirits they have been fiddleing and dancing while I am writing this letter. Wheeler plays the claronet and Whittle the violin."33 At Acapulco he reported seeing "more gambling and Cock fighting then I ever have in my life all put to gether." Between San Diego and Monterey, he "saw at least 2000 head of Wild Cattle on the Cost in the Course of the day." Thirty-four days from New York, he finally landed in San Francisco on February 21:

Friday 6 AM arrived in the Bay of San Francisco cast anchor in front of the town Paid dollar to get a Shore Mr Stanton [from Danville] and myself rented a small Cottage for the Small Sum of 30 dollars for one week and the house would not of cost in the states more than \$25 at the Most But we are getting used to California Prices very fast Some of our Boys have been to work a little since they have been here I worked yesterday and this forenoon and have been studying all this afternoon to See whether I Should Charge him 15 or 20 dollars

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*These photographs, probably taken at the time of their wedding in Peacham in October 1849, show John S. Way (1822–1909), one of the first men to leave for California from Caledonia County, sporting a fashionable beard along the jawline, called a “saucer” or “trencher” beard. His bride, Sarah Walbridge (1827–1909), wears a dark silk cape or shawl—probably to hide her pregnancy. Sarah had a baby girl four and a half months after John left. Author’s collection.*

for the day and half. I think By morning it will be 20 sure for I see that men have no Consciencs in this Frisco we have this afternoon Purchased a Boat to go up the river to the Mines for 200 dollars that would not of Cost 25 in the States.

Next John referred to the colorful expression “forty-niners,” as the miners in the early years were called, used to characterize the California gold rush and its exotic adventure. “Well now for the Eliphant I think that we have seen a little of the eliphant in getting here.” His letters were to describe “seeing the elephant,” an adventure of a lifetime—exciting but also dangerous.<sup>34</sup>

But first John had to convey his disappointment in not receiving any letters from Sarah. He ordered her to “write me once a month that is as often as the mails come.” Before closing this letter, he gave a detailed account of mail day in San Francisco:

The mails that come on in the steamer this time was sorted and ready to distribute on Sunday morning and there was more persons than could be served that day at the [post] office door—before sun rise they form in roes and each man takes his turn . . . no one

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attempts to [break] in the line . . . sometimes a man will get within 8 or 10 [feet] of the door and sing out who wants to buy my chance they often pay an ounce of Gold for a mans chance and then they exchange places it is the most civil place I was ever in.<sup>35</sup>

By April, John's letters came from the digging in Hangtown, Eldorado County, California. Like most miners writing home, he began with a report on his health, "good and has been," followed by mining news: "I have been on prospecting Excursion in Company with four others." John also explained why in his last letter, he did not mention the illness of Harvey Blanchard. He did not want to worry the mother of the boy unnecessarily, which certainly would have been the case, for the boy who subsequently recovered began mining like the others. John was careful in what he wrote about company members, especially when describing their success or failure, as he had promised himself "not to write one word about what the Company made." This promise must have been hard to accept by the folks at home, but since it was the practice that letters be circulated among the families of those in California, it did not raise hopes, and also kept his information private.

After two months in California, John gave his judgment to Sarah: "Tell any one that wants to come to California to stay at home."<sup>36</sup> He did not explain if this was because of lack of home and family, poor living conditions, hard work, high prices, or unmet expectations, but he was clear in his message. Almost all of the Caledonia County boys whose letters have survived shared this sentiment,<sup>37</sup> somewhat dramatically expressed by a correspondent to the *Boston Atlas* and reprinted in the St. Johnsbury paper: "If any of our friends anticipate coming to California discourage them . . . and if he hears any one say, California, with an idea of going there, to just catch them and put them in a Lunatic Asylum."<sup>38</sup>

By John's next letter, written June 21st, he had received three letters from Sarah, "and I assure you they were more then welcomed." Although he had promised to write nothing about mining, he could not resist describing his recent claim "Paid 830 dollars for the Privilege of four men to work with 14 others on the bar we since have bot out 3 of them and that gives us all a [better] chance to work on the bar . . . we should get it worked out by the 4th of July." He casually announced that after a little more than five months "the Company broke up,"<sup>39</sup> giving no reason why this happened or if the procedures for dissolution agreed to in the company contract had been followed. Historian Ernest Bogart explains in his history of Peacham that this company "was dissolved after a year because of the heavy expenses for sickness and other unforeseen needs."<sup>40</sup>

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In his fourth letter, John made a point of detailing for Sarah the price of almost everything he bought so she would know how he spent his money and what his meals were:

We have fresh beef which we Pay 30 cts per Pound we have it every day Potatoes from 30 to 60 cts per pound onions \$1.25 cts per pound Pork 80.00 per hun flour 16.00 per hun Sugar 50 cts per pound Molasses 8.00 per Gal Pickles \$1.00 per Gallon Butter from 1.15 to 1.25 per Pound Dried Apples 60 cts per Pound Peaches dried with stones out 60 to 75 all of the above articles can be found at our tent any and every day it costs us about 150 cts per day to live our income must exceed that or we should have to dispence with some of the luxuries for I had but 140 dollars when I got in the mines.

It is not known how much money John had with him when he left Vermont, but by all accounts the trip to New York, the stay in that city, the ship on the Atlantic, the journey across the isthmus, the ship on the Pacific, the stay in San Francisco, the mining equipment, and living expenses cost more than three hundred dollars.<sup>41</sup>

Another Caledonia County man faced financial difficulties before reaching the mines. The newspaper identified him only as “a young man from Sheffield” who wrote his relatives in spring 1850 confessing he “was eight dollars in debt to the company.” He arrived at Wood’s Creek in Tuolumne County<sup>42</sup> “having walked seventy-five miles, and paid one hundred and thirty-seven for freight and passage . . . besides paying for innumerable other things indispensable to a camp life.” He went on about his troubles and how he solved them with Yankee ingenuity:

All hands went to work, and we only got \$2.00 apiece per day, just enough to get us a little bread and water for supper. After working so for a few days, we found it would not answer, J— and H— quit and began to hunt for work, and succeeded in getting employ at 5 dollars per day, and they began to feel a little better. But A— and myself, what was to become of us? We wanted a cradle to wash [the earth] with, but had no money to buy one with. Well, I will tell you, A— went to hunting for gold, and I went into the woods to cull out a cradle, and in two days and a half I whittled out a thing, from a pine log, and I went to work, and got ten dollars the first day that we worked it. So I think we shall live yet.<sup>43</sup>

Family at home watched closely for letters from California. Alfred Rix, husband of Sarah Way’s sister, contemplated going to California as he was not happy, or as the people at the time would say “not content,” in Peacham and had asked John’s advice. John replied, “Tell Alfred that the last 3 Saturdays have ben lucky ones the one before I wrote to him four of us took out \$1150.00 and next one after I wrote him—only 7 dollars!” John admitted to Sarah that “the best weeks work I have

made in California was last week my dividend was \$334 after paying all expences." He hastily added, "I want you to Keep the Particulars about what I am making to yourself."<sup>44</sup> At the same time *The North Star* reported that the men who had left the area in January 1850 were all "doing very well" in the mines, each earning about five dollars a day.<sup>45</sup>

John ended his letter with what must have been good news to Sarah, who by now was the mother of a baby girl: "I shall be at home next Winter some time if I have my health." But he did not wait that long.

#### RETURN OF THE EARLY STARTERS

On August 24, 1850, seven and a half months after leaving Peacham, John Way was back. Alfred Rix wrote in his journal: "The Californian was at home again—with his pocket full of Rocks."<sup>46</sup> *The Caledonian* expanded on the situation but could not refrain from giving its negative view of going to California:

Four of the "Peacham California Company" composed principally of persons from Peacham and Danville returned home last week. Two of them, Martins, both of Danville. The four bring home about \$3000 each. The remainder of the company had not, all of them, succeeded quite so well; but as a whole had done much better than the average among the diggers. The company had dissolved, but a portion of them purchased an acre, and were lucky in making a good selection. The individuals returning had seen enough of the gold country—one of them was just able to get home—sold out their shares of the acre upon favorable terms.<sup>47</sup>

Of the eighteen men who left in January 1850, town records show that fifteen returned to Vermont. One of the group, thirty-year-old Isaac W. Stanton, Jr., died in Nevada City, California, on December 29, 1850, "of congestion of the brain, being sick only 25 hours."<sup>48</sup> Another member, James M. Walbridge, disappeared mysteriously on the return trip. According to his biography in the family genealogy, in August 1850 as he was crossing the isthmus of Panama, "he was persuaded to leave his company and go on ahead. He was never heard from again, and was probably murdered for his gold."<sup>49</sup> A third member of the group, A. A. Wheeler, does not reappear in the Peacham town records or in letters from those who remained in California and thus is unaccounted for.<sup>50</sup>

Who did and who did not return is easier to research than the success of the returned Caledonia County miners. Fortunately, among the John Way letters is a receipt showing some of the men attempting to work together as they did in the beginning of the adventure. At least four members of this company pooled their riches in "one valise" that according to the receipt dated August 11, 1850, contained "Fifteen thousand & Two Hundred Dollars in gold dust."<sup>51</sup> Shipped on board the

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**SHIPPED** in good order and well conditioned by John Martin on board the  
 (Shimmer) called the Crescent City wherof W. Lord is  
 Master, now lying in the Port of Chagres and bound for New York TO SAY:  
One Valise said to Contain Fifteen  
 Thousand & Two Hundred Dollars in gold  
 dust

J. M.

Being marked and numbered as in the margin, are to be delivered in the like good order and condition at the Port of  
New York [the dangers of the Navigation only excepted] unto  
John Martin or to his Assignee they paying freight for the said  
 by One Thousand Fifty Dollars & 50 Cents  
 with \_\_\_\_\_ primage and average accustomed.

By W. Lord Master or Purser of the said Vessel hath offered to 3 Bills of Lading  
 all of this tenor and date, one of which being accomplished, the others to stand void.  
 Dated in Chagres the 11<sup>th</sup> day of August 18 50  
W. Lord

Receipt for “One valise said to Contain Fifteen Thousand & Two Hundred Dollars in gold dust” made out to John Martin, shipped on board the steamer *Crescent City* from Panama to New York, August 11, 1850. Four returning miners placed their earnings in this trunk: Chester Martin, John Martin, Alex McLaren, and John S. Way. Private collection.

*Crescent City* from Panama to New York, the trunk arrived in Peacham on September 21, when Alfred Rix wrote in his journal:

The Gold from California, dug by Way, Martins, & MacLeran has come. John [Way] has got as much as a boy can lift all in 20s & 10s— he don’t tell how much in value, but I guess it is \$2700.00.<sup>52</sup>

The winners seem to have been Chester and John Martin, Alex McLaren, and John Way.

Of the fifteen in this company who returned, the earnings of ten can be traced. They range from Leverett Hand with \$243 on the low end to John Martin and John Way on the high end, each with at least three thousand dollars, probably more. Town land records point to earnings if the miners purchased real estate upon their return. Of this early group of Caledonia County miners, five men purchased real estate, probably farms, as recorded in land records: Daniel Aiken and Alex McLaren in Barnet, John Martin in Danville, John S. Way in Hardwick, and Harvey Blanchard in Peacham.

Two members of this group returned with no financial gain. James G. White came back empty handed and in poor health. He died on May 19, 1852, shortly after arriving in Peacham.<sup>53</sup> Bailey Watts also was unsuccessful in the mines and within a year went back to California for a second try.

John Way moved his family to a farm in Hardwick two months after returning. In a letter, Sarah's mother claimed John purchased his farm for \$2,100. Still not satisfied, John flirted with the idea in 1853 of going to the gold rush in Australia. Instead, in spring 1855, he took his family, now with two children, to Minnesota.<sup>54</sup> Bill Whittle and the Martin brothers also moved to Minnesota around the same year. John Way purchased 160 acres and eventually built a solid two-story frame house in Northfield with lumber from John Martin's sawmills and lumber yards and with the help of labor by Bill Whittle and Chester Martin.<sup>55</sup> Once more the California company members were working together. The well-being and financial success of these miners can be traced to their trip to the California gold fields.

#### THE SECOND WAVE: MEN WHO LEFT CALEDONIA COUNTY IN OCTOBER 1851

In the fall of 1851, two and a half years after the discovery of gold in California, a second group of men whose trip has been well documented left Caledonia County. These men departed by train from the railroad depot in Barnet, which had opened in the fall of 1850. The group was much more loosely organized than the earlier company of John Way, and no formal contract was drawn up. However, the men did meet several times and fourteen contributed fifty dollars each to send one of their group to New York to scout for transportation to California. The one chosen was Alfred Rix, the former principal of the Peacham Academy and a new member of the Vermont bar. Alfred took the train to New York and returned with little information other than that the men simply needed to go to New York and sign up for a ship.<sup>56</sup>

This group eventually consisted of twenty-four men: sixteen from Peacham, four from Danville, three from Ryegate, and one from Barnet.<sup>57</sup> In striking contrast to the earlier group, almost all of these men had attended the noted Peacham Academy. Education had long been recognized in New England as key to a better life. In Vermont a good education was so valued that when twenty-three-year-old Isaac Pollard of Plymouth wrote from the gold mines to a relative considering coming to California, Isaac told him "he had better come to Cal. if he could not have the privilege of going to school more than 2 or 3 terms, but if he could go through college he had better do it and let Cal. pass from his mind."<sup>58</sup>

In this group were two sets of brothers: Chandler and Mark Blanchard of Peacham and Ambrose and Henry Knight of Ryegate. The lawyer, Alfred Rix, traveled with his cousin Sidney Rix, brother-in-law Dustan Walbridge, both of Peacham, and his older brother, Oscar Rix, who came from Boston to join the group in New York. Dustan, a newly minted wheel-

wright, was the youngest of the group at eighteen. The oldest man at thirty-seven, Timothy Cowles, Jr., had worked for some time with his father in a hat shop at Peacham Corner.<sup>59</sup> Five of the group were married, and one, thirty-six-year-old John Gracy, left a wife and five children in Peacham.

Caledonia County miners were no longer farmers with little education. They shared the desire of the earlier group for financial independence but having attended the Peacham Academy, they sought money to establish their position in the professions or trades.

These Argonauts debated whether or not to purchase life insurance before leaving Vermont. An obvious insurer was National Life Insurance Company of Montpelier, chartered in the state in 1848. Researching the company's records, historian T. D. Seymour Bassett found that although the company had charged high premiums to the 500 policyholders leaving for the California gold mines, collecting a total of a third of a million dollars, it paid out, through the 1850s, only \$121,000 in death claims.<sup>60</sup> Rowland Allen, who left Ferrisburgh for California, took out two policies each for \$500: one for the benefit of his wife and the other for a friend who had provided funds for the trip. Rowland died on the voyage and the Company "promptly paid" the thousand dollars. The premiums he had paid to the Company were \$24.15 for each policy.<sup>61</sup> In early 1852 when Alfred Rix investigated the possibilities of life insurance for his younger brother, Hale Rix, who was headed for California, he decided to insure with the Hartford Connecticut Company. When it was his turn to go to California, Alfred tried to insure his own life with this company, but according to his wife's entry in their journal, after his departure, she learned that the company had rejected him "on account of a trouble about his throat."<sup>62</sup> It is not known what this medical condition was but the refusal indicates that insurance companies were selective in choosing their clients.

Immediately upon landing in San Francisco, the men of the group traveled by boat up the Sacramento River about one hundred and fifty miles to the Northern gold mines. There they experienced the same situation as J. B. Darling of Groton when he landed in November 1851: "The whole region had been so completely worked that there was little left for the new arrivals."<sup>63</sup> J. B. returned to Vermont with empty pockets. The story of this group is told through the surviving letters of Alfred Rix, who settled permanently in California, and Dustan Walbridge, who returned to Vermont, wiser but no richer.

#### ALFRED RIX'S STORY

Alfred Rix had rejected farm life early. At age nineteen, according to the autobiography at the beginning of the journal kept by him and his

wife, Alfred, displaying his wit, “got it into his noodle to go to college.”<sup>64</sup> He left his father’s farm in Dalton, New Hampshire, and moved to Peacham to stay with his maternal great aunt, Sarah Morrill Stevens, the mother of Thaddeus Stevens, while he “fitted” for college at the Peacham Academy. Like his cousin, Alfred was a strong supporter of abolition. After graduating from the University of Vermont and accepting the position as principal of the Peacham Academy, he helped establish a Union Store in Peacham to benefit the abolition movement. Local merchants, fearing the competition, attacked him verbally. Alfred felt this was the cause of a sharp reduction in the number of scholars at the Peacham Academy and thus a decrease in his pay. He sued and eventually received some monetary compensation, but ill feelings persisted. Alfred was definitely looking for a new place to settle. He must have wanted a community with fewer conventions and less rigid leadership, and a place having more economic vitality than Caledonia County offered.

Alfred had carefully followed John S. Way’s adventure and success. After the birth of his son at the end of 1850 and seeing his wife, Chastina, comfortably settled in a house at Peacham Corner, Alfred announced his plan to try California. His wife’s journal entry for October 4, 1851, described their last time together in Vermont:

Got up about half past one & got Alfred some breakfast. At two he was oblige[d] to start. It is hard to part with a friend . . . where danger lies in their track. Never Shall I forget our parting; if it be our last there is a sweet consolation in the thought that we were & ever have been the happiest of the happy in each other’s society. He was gone! The hours are days. Lonely and sad am I & our little boy he misses his papa.

Alfred was a faithful letter writer. He even wrote Chastina’s mother and stepfather, often giving a fuller picture of his activities to them than he did to his wife. In June 1852, when he admitted failure in the mines, he described his ill-fated trip back to the city:

You needn’t tell Chastina that while coming down the Sacramento I lost *all* I had except what was on my back at the time. My blankets (4 nice ones as ever covered a miner) were rolled around my entire stock of earthly effects, consisting of shirts, shoes, pants, vests, stockings, hankerchiefs, letters, writing apparatus and countless other “fixings” . . . some rascal no doubt thought from my affections I seemed to exhibit for my pack and from the hand and weight of the thing that I had a “pile” in it—so while the boat was touching at Benicia, he watched his chance & as I stepped forward for only two or three minutes he walked ashore with my flannels—it was in the night and by the time I found that my roll was not aboard we were well on our way to San Francisco. That’s the man what I curse every night and morning. But when Chastina asks me how my flannels and hosiery

.....



*In honor of their first anniversary, Alfred S. Rix (1821–1904) and Chastina Walbridge Rix (1824–1857) went to Danville to have this photograph taken. A year later Alfred left for California, leaving his wife in Peacham. Alfred wears the standard dark suit of the period, appropriate for the principal of the Academy studying to be a lawyer, and Chastina wears a late 1840s style dress with gathered bodice and slightly full sleeves. Peeking out from the top of her head is a carved tortoiseshell comb tucked into a bun. Print from daguerreotype, FN-31393, courtesy California Historical Society.*

wear & last—am I to be blamed for smiling & answering her that she need expect nothing else but that shirts & stockings made like them ar' will last well and do good service anywhere.

He added a chilling story of life in San Francisco:

On the last arrival of the [steamer] we walked down towards her along Long Wharf—the new comers were scattered along the streets “sucking” the various baits set for them. We noticed an unusual crowd about one of the gambling tables—we went into the Saloon and looked over their shoulders . . . we noticed one poor fool—as fresh & innocent as a basket of garden sauce—putting down his tens & twenties—losing at every shake—& expecting, yes *absolutely knowing* that he must win—he *knew* he could make a pile right off—I was looking directly over his shoulder—I saw the exact amount in his wallet & saw where it was going to—I knew full well the rules of the house, that there must not be even the wink of an interference in

behalf of the victim—not even by brother for brother—but I couldn’t stand by & see what I did and do nothing—I pulled the booby gently by the coat-tail—he took the hint & was fool enough to follow me out—I told him to quit the diggings & he did, but the gamblers got their eyes on me & followed us some distance. We were stopped by 6 of them who were ready for a brush, but after a short tongue fight both parties backed off.

At the end of this letter, Alfred began to express a new view of life in San Francisco, describing it in a more positive tone:

The influence of gamblers though still great in this city is on the decline . . . . Good men and good reputations are rapidly gaining the ascendancy—men are bringing their families & accumulating their property here & they *must* have their things in a *safe* place.<sup>65</sup>

With his college education, teaching experience, and law degree, Alfred was able to find good and meaningful work in the Golden State, unlike many of the miners. Within a short time, he took up his old profession of teaching.<sup>66</sup> He started “to invite” Chastina to join him, and he held out the threat that he planned to remain at least another two years in California before even considering returning to New England.<sup>67</sup>

#### ANDREW ROBERTS’S STORY

Another miner who thought of making California his home was Walden native Andrew Roberts, who had arrived in San Francisco in January 1852. Eight months later Andrew asked his wife, “how you would like to come to this country?”<sup>68</sup> Mathilda, only nineteen when she married Andrew, just weeks before he left for California, responded briskly: “I never want to see California . . . . and I hope you will never think of settling off there.”<sup>69</sup> She had given birth to a boy and her life was full with motherhood and increasing debts. In December, Mathilda wanted to know how Andrew was doing.

I was somewhat disappointed on the reception of your last letter that you did not write something about your claims . . . . We should feel a great deal better if you would write just how much you are making . . . . it is not because we think so much of the gold that you get, but we want you to get ready to come home.

On the last sheet of this letter Mathilda wrote in her girlish handwriting a six-stanza poem that began:

I Wait for thee  
 The hearth is swept, the fire is bright,  
 The kettle sings for tea;  
 The cloth is spread, the lamps are light,  
 The hot cakes smoke in napkins white,  
 And now I wait for thee.<sup>70</sup>

After a year without her husband, Mathilda left Walden and made the rounds of family members and began to “work now at dressmaking” and “to earn my board . . . and see if I cannot pay up my last year bills.”<sup>71</sup> When Andrew complained about her leaving Walden, she reassured him:

It will be considerable cheaper for you. They will not charge any board and I think I shall work out if I can get a chance. I cannot get along without some money. It costs something to clothe the boy, but I would not ask you to send me any till you can without making you short. I can get it some way.<sup>72</sup>

In May, Andrew “sent home three hundred dollars” and promised more. He summarized his situation:

I hope you will not reproach me for not coming home, but I shall come as soon as I can fetch things round to suit me. You know what I came out here for and if you know me, you know I shall not come to the states until I have accomplished my object. If my health is spared one year more, I hope I can get money enough to get us a small home of our own.<sup>73</sup>

He was still digging in July 1853, eighteen months after leaving Vermont. There are no more surviving letters, but family legend has it that Andrew “did make a good strike.” He eventually returned to Walden, where he and Mathilda raised seven children.<sup>74</sup>

#### THE WALBRIDGE SISTERS’ STORY

Chastina Walbridge Rix, after more than six months of cajoling by her husband, headed for California in January 1853. She was twenty-eight years old, the mother of two-year-old Julian, just out of diapers or nappies, as they were called then. At the last moment, her younger sister Clara joined her. Like hundreds of New England women, Chastina and Clara traveled unaccompanied by male relatives to an unknown future.

The Rix home in San Francisco became a stopping place for Caledonia County men, and since Chastina and Alfred kept their journal, there is a record of those arriving from Vermont on their way to the mines and those leaving California on their way home. The names of nineteen men, known from Vermont, appear in the Rix journal from May 1853 to April 1854, when Alfred and Chastina ceased keeping their journal. One of the last entries Chastina wrote appeared on the first Sunday in April 1854:

More of the Peacham boys come. Among them George Currier & William Gilfillan. People all well at home boys took supper with us & stayed in evening. It seems good to see those with whom we have been acquainted before we came here.

The following Tuesday, she added that these brothers-in-law, George and William, “called on us they start this afternoon for the mines.

Rather hard for those who come to this country now.”<sup>75</sup> By spring 1854, the gold fields were crowded with miners and those most successful were using technology far more complicated and expensive than the simple tools of the early miners. *The Caledonian* as early as the fall of 1851 began to proclaim that “the main chance for obtaining gold . . . can be done only by a large outlay of means.”<sup>76</sup>

Not surprisingly, some who stopped at the Rixes came to see twenty-two-year-old Clara Walbridge, who had been a successful teacher in



*For the Caledonia County boys it was a treat to call on Clara Walbridge (1830–1917), a girl from home who began teaching in San Francisco in August 1853. In this photograph, probably taken in 1854, Clara is dressed for a dance in an evening dress, velvet trimmed with lace, denoted by the exposed shoulders and short sleeves. Her ringlets are a young woman’s hairstyle, popular from the 1840s to at least the mid 1850s. She wears elegant jewelry—necklace, probably gold, drop earrings, and bracelets, fashionably wore in pairs. Ambrotype, private collection.*

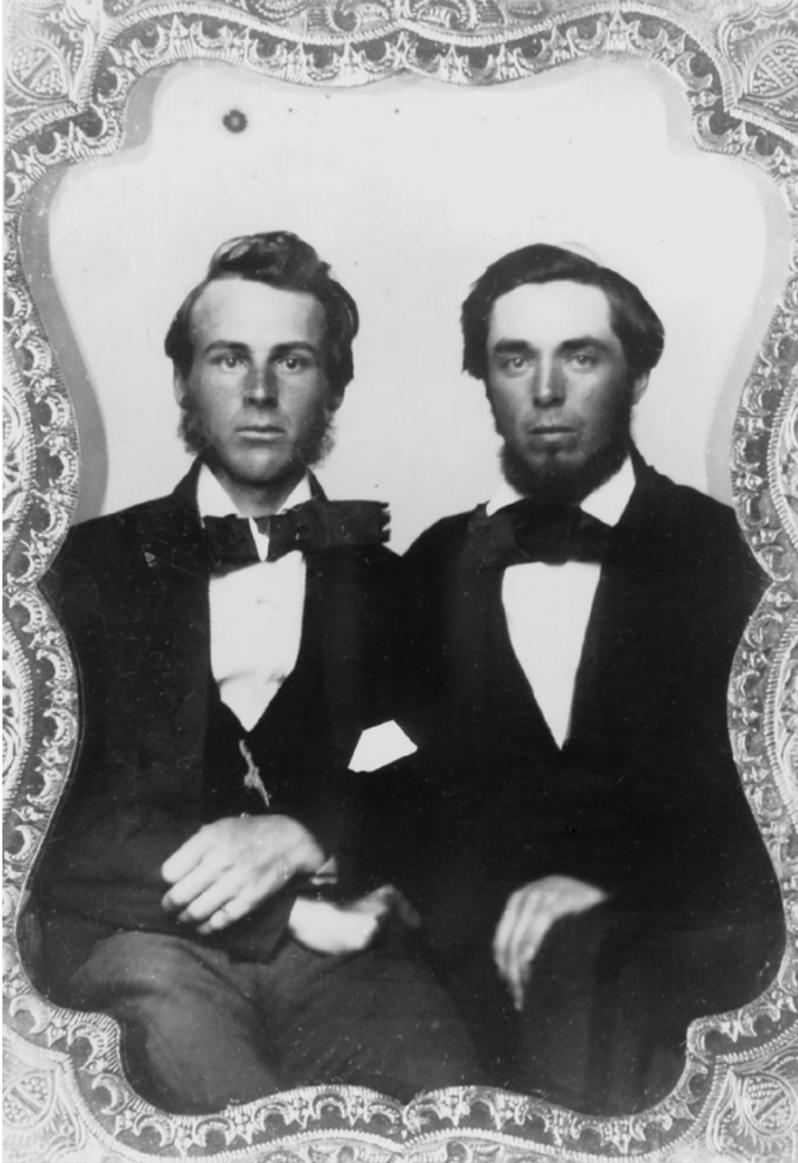
Vermont and in the fall of 1853 began teaching in San Francisco's public school near Mission Dolores. Clara was spirited, as she demonstrated with her choice on the Panama isthmus to wear bloomers and ride the mule astride rather than sidesaddle, as did more ladylike Chastina. Clara became a magnet for young men who rarely saw a woman in California, let alone one from their Vermont hometown. Throughout the 1850s in the mining area, men outnumbered women by about one hundred to three, reported historian J. S. Holliday. In San Francisco the 1852 census put the figure at "nearly six to one."<sup>77</sup> A single, well-educated, employed New England woman like Clara was quite an attraction. She was courted by many, and eventually in 1856 chose as her husband Russell K. Rogers, whom she had known in Peacham. They raised their family in California, where eventually they both died.

#### DUSTAN WALBRIDGE'S STORY

In the fall of 1851, Chastina and Clara's brother, Dustan Walbridge, had a hard time persuading his mother Roxana to let him go to California. Only eighteen, Dustan had recently completed his wheelwright apprenticeship and had not yet settled in any job in Vermont. The timing was good for him, but he lacked the full \$350 needed to pay for the trip. His mother felt he was too young to leave home, but eventually she relented, and her husband, Dustan's stepfather, Lyman Watts, loaned him \$200. The family, as his sister Clara wrote to relatives, felt that if Dustan did not leave with Alfred, he would leave a few months later without family.<sup>78</sup> For more than a year, Dustan worked steadily in the mines, trying several claims, without success. Finally, in spring of 1853, he came down from the gold country to San Francisco. Fortunately he had his wheelwright trade to turn to and he had his sister Chastina's family to board with. In an early April 1853 letter, Dustan admitted his lack of success and explained to John Way, his brother-in-law, the differences in mining from when John had been in California two years earlier:

Mining is caried on verry differnt here now from what it was when you were in this country I presume—the barrs, and ravines that are easily worked with but little expence and which yielded fair wages are pretty well skinned by Chinamen and greenhorns, and most of the diggings here are in the hills, instead of toms and rockers, long sluices are used, and all the dirt is washed from ten to 60 feet deep.

At the end of his letter, Dustan expressed the closest he allowed himself to admit to homesickness: "I should like to give you a call and get some sugar or some of them trout you have salted downe I wouldnt mind taking a mug of cider and a dish of apples."<sup>79</sup>



*Dustan Walbridge (1832–1864) and Ira Rix (1831–1860), two failed miners who roomed together at the Rix home in 1854 while they tried their luck in San Francisco. Dustan, on the left, with fashionable bushy sideburns and his watch chain peeking out of his vest, worked at his trade as a wheelwright. Ira, on the right, with a trencher beard, worked at a saw mill. Both men wear turn-down collars with cravats with large bows and horizontal ends, popular at the time. Ambrotype, author's collection.*

In May 1855 his mother Roxana, writing from Peacham, explained to John and Sarah Way in Minnesota that

Dustan had lost 400 dollars by the company he worked for and he don't know but he shall have to stay more than one year yet he is tired of the place there is so much cheating there he says he thinks some times he will come home money or no money.

She added, "I hope he will."<sup>80</sup> Roxana did not report that Dustan had repaid his stepfather the loan that allowed him to go to California.<sup>81</sup> Dustan was out of debt but not ahead.

In San Francisco, Dustan began to express an interest in what one Peacham miner called "business with the Sisters."<sup>82</sup> In a letter to his half sister Alice, he asked her "to pick out the prettyest girl there is around there and ask her to wait till I get back."<sup>83</sup> Later, he complained to his mother that he was twenty-four years old, "almost an old *Bach* . . . have yet to write my first love letter have never yet experienced the deep felicity of sitting up with any of those adorable specimens of female loveliness."<sup>84</sup> His older sister Clara articulated it well when she acknowledged that Dustan "was so young when he left home that he never went out into society much and . . . begins to feel as though he would like to be where he could be with young people."<sup>85</sup>

When Dustan returned to Vermont, he toyed with the idea of going in 1859 to the gold mines at Pike's Peak in Kansas Territory but instead began to court a friend of Alice's. In the fall of 1860, twenty-eight-year-old Dustan married eighteen-year-old Abbie Hardy. Two years later he enlisted in the Union Army. He survived the California gold rush but died in the Civil War.<sup>86</sup>

#### RETURN OF THE SECOND WAVE

Of the twenty-four miners from Caledonia County who went to the gold fields in October 1851, one remained permanently in California—Alfred Rix; one died—Sidney Rix;<sup>87</sup> and one joined those who, failing to strike it rich in the California gold fields, traveled to Australia where gold was discovered in 1853—Michael Kavanagh.<sup>88</sup>

Fourteen miners returned to Vermont. Of the Peacham men, all but two, John Gracy and Dustan Walbridge, came back with at least three hundred dollars. Town records, family letters, and local histories give some clues as to the miners's success. Brothers Chandler and Mark Blanchard mined steadily together for a year and a half and returned in fall 1853 with financial gain; Chandler came back with \$1,006 and Mark, \$506. Chester Brown made plans to remain in California but "the flat refusal" of his wife to join him changed his plans,<sup>89</sup> so he returned to Peacham where the 1854 grand list records him having \$300.

Timothy Cowles, Jr., increased the value of his Peacham farm from \$225 in 1850 to \$650 in 1855 and he added to his holdings at the Corner with a “House & Shop” valued at \$450. John Ewell remained in California for more than ten years but eventually returned and worked in the business started by his father in the sawmill and gristmill at what became known as “Ewell’s Pond” on the Peacham/Danville road. When John Gracy returned in June 1853, Peacham tavern owner, Lafayette Strobridge, wrote, “I think there is not much California dust sticking about his clothes if he has I would like a little of it that he owes me.”<sup>90</sup> Gracy again became a hired hand on a local farm. Sprague Harriman returned in spring 1854, and by October married the sister of one of his California sojourners and bought a farm in Peacham valued at \$2,000. William D. Hooker, who with his older brother Lyman ran a wood-hauling business in Sacramento, lost everything in one of the city’s fires, but he still returned with \$908 in 1856. Asa Livingston reported \$403 in the 1853 Peacham grand list and later made a name for himself as foreman of the Fairbanks Farm in St. Johnsbury, where he worked for twenty-eight years.<sup>91</sup>

In late summer 1853, Harvey Varnum and his brother Mark left the mining fields, went to San Francisco, visited the Rixes, and eventually boarded a ship for Panama. Harvey brought back \$741, according to the 1854 Peacham grand list; Mark had no gain. Varnum family legend tells of Mark’s father outfitting him for his trip to California. Having not repaid this debt by the time of his father’s death in 1863, Mark found written next to his name in the settlement of the estate the word “none,” with the explanation that he “had been advanced in the lifetime” of the father “an amount larger than his share.”<sup>92</sup>

John C. Blanchard, cousin of Harvey and Mark, also part of this group, returned in 1856 with \$1,150. While digging near Placerville in November 1854, John wrote his brother back in Vermont and summarized the mining activity, giving a glimpse of how closely the men watched each other’s success and failure:

I have now been in the State of California just three years and of the 42 who started with me as far as I can learn 4 have died, 2 gone to Australia, 13 have returned, 4 I have lost track of, and the rest are scattered through the country yet.<sup>93</sup>

As long as the miners who returned with no rocks in their pockets had good health and no debt, they could hold their heads high. They had taken part in an historic and exciting adventure, traveled all the way to California, worked the gold mines, and had a story to tell for the rest of their lives.

THE STRAGGLERS: MEN WHO LEFT CALEDONIA COUNTY  
IN DECEMBER 1851

Five young men, all having attended the Peacham Academy and the Congregational Church's Sabbath School, traveled together to California near the end of 1851: Ephraim W. Clark, John Eastman, Fowler Ford, Martin Hidden, and Ashbel Martin. Joining them was William Jennison, a thirty-eight-year-old farmer with family ties to Peacham, although since 1840 he had lived in Walden with a wife and four children.<sup>94</sup> Another member of the group, Leonard Martin, was related to both Fowler Ford and Ashbel Martin. Apparently Leonard relied on his carpenter skills rather than attend the Academy with his cousins. The eighth member of the group, Bailey Watts, was making his second trip to California. Bailey may have agreed with Frederick Billings of Woodstock, who went to California in April 1849 and warned that a "stay here will unfit a man for the more quiet and uniform occupations of a less excited life" in Vermont.<sup>95</sup> Bailey, still young at twenty-five and unmarried, probably simply wanted a second chance to succeed in the mines.

EPHRAIM CLARK'S STORY

The adventures of this group can be followed through letters written by Ephraim W. Clark. Surprisingly, both sides of the correspondence survive—the miner's letters and the family's replies from Peacham—which means Ephraim brought the letters he received in California back to Vermont.<sup>96</sup> The collection consists of twenty-six letters: ten penned by Ephraim, the miner; eleven by his older sister, Elisabeth Clark Strobbridge, living with her husband and children at Peacham Corner; and five by their father and stepmother, Russell and Aphia Clark, living on their farm at Peacham Hollow. Ephraim Clark was twenty-four years old when he left his father's seventy-acre farm, valued in the Peacham grand list at \$1,035. Russell Clark had no money in the bank or in stocks and had a debt of \$150.<sup>97</sup>

The Clarks, like most Caledonia County farmers, were a pious family and active members of the local church—in their case the Peacham Congregational Church founded in 1794—so it is not unusual to find religious and Biblical references throughout the family letters.<sup>98</sup> This is seen even in Ephraim's first letter, written on December 28, 1851, in New York where the group went to board a steamer on the Atlantic:

I hope the God in whom you trust will take care of you. Depend upon it I shall return as soon as possible if God spares my life & prospers me in my voyage Pray for me that I may be kept from the dangerous Eavils which I may be surrounded.<sup>99</sup>

The “dangerous Eavils” that Ephraim referred to were well known: gambling, drinking, fighting, tobacco, brothels, using profanity, and not observing the Sabbath. All were well documented in letters from California including one written by Seneca Ladd, a miner from Danville, to the editor of *The North Star*: “This is a bad country for a young man to come who has not yet formed his character for he is liable to get led astray. Gambling and drinking is everyday business.”<sup>100</sup> Another miner, Alfred Goodenough, wrote his family in Hardwick on April 23, 1852:

You have no idea how gambling is carried on here each shop has a band of music that plays all the time to call the fellows in Sundays the Miners all go to town to spend what they have earned through the week there are thousands here that are all discouraged that have had money and lost it gambling that will never get back to the states they think nothing of looseing five hundred dollars in one night when they are on a spree.<sup>101</sup>

Few letters have been preserved that describe any Caledonia County miner going astray or even being rowdy, but then the local men would not report the bad behavior of their miner townsmen in letters home.<sup>102</sup>

Ephraim Clark, the only son of Russell Clark, worried about his father’s health and urged him to “be careful & not work to hard.” His pleas that his fifty-seven-year-old father hire a good man to help on the farm were for the most part ignored. When Russell did comply, the hired hand left before completing his time. Russell Clark evidently was not an easy man to work for.

Debt hung heavy on the gold seekers as most had borrowed in order to finance the trip.<sup>103</sup> Many, including Ephraim, took paying jobs before going to the mines. In the same August letter when he expressed concern about his father’s working, Ephraim described his own work on the Ranch of G. C. Davis in Puto River near Sacramento:

At first I worked in the garden and helped milk after a little I went in the kitchen to help the cook we averaged from 15 to 30 men to cook for. The cook was an Englishman & loved whiskey my business was to bring water chop wood & wash dishes & set the table & wait upon it. Then the cook took to drinking in good earnest & the whole buisness fell on me so that I was chief cook & bottle washer . . . . I wanted to go up to Hangtown to see the boys [from Peacham] . . . . he promised to keep sober . . . . but I had not been gone more than half an hour before he was drunk again . . . . I was gone 5 days when I got back they were all glad to see me & I was highly entertained for three or four days with their stories of his actions.<sup>104</sup>

Reading Ephraim’s words, his sister Elisabeth wrote of her amazement to learn of his being “established as cook in a public house.” She thought “that is the last thing I should have expected to hear from you” and

teasingly added, "I shall have to see some of it with my own eyes before I can believe it."<sup>105</sup>

Working as a cook must have paid fairly well, for Ephraim ended his August letter with the simple statement, "I send One hundred Dollars to Lafayette Strobridge." This must have been prearranged, as Ephraim's brother-in-law could easily handle the financial matters since he ran the tavern and livery stable at Peacham Corner, the main village in town, and must have made frequent trips to the Caledonia National Bank in Danville. Over the next three years, Ephraim sent more than \$900 to his family, much more than he borrowed to go to California. He used the standard practice of sending money by bank draft or check.<sup>106</sup>

By January 1853, a year after arriving in California, Ephraim was deep into the diggings and wrote his father and stepmother:

Another new year has commenced . . . Never before has time flown on such eagle wings . . . My own success in money making has not been such as I could wish on account of my health altho I had a fair prospect in the spring. They say it is a strait road that don't turn some times, so I am in hopes that mine will turn soon.

Ephraim described his living conditions, sharing a cabin built by Ashbel Martin at White Rock Canyon along the South Fork of the American River, about three miles northeast of Placerville.

My cabin-mates are Ashbel Martin, John Blanchard & William Jen-nison these long evenings we exhaust almost every topic of conversation or argument & endeavor to enjoy life as it passes. Martin L. Tupper's Poems, Isaac Watts on the mind, a few religious tracts, and the Bible & Hymn Book is about the extent of our library. One reads & the rest comments . . . all the Peacham boys that I know are well some of them have done well & others have not . . . I hope there will be no more Peacham representatives come to these parts till I get away but if they had rather come here & work for their board than work at home with all its comforts & get a little more, let 'em come.<sup>107</sup>

Upon arriving in California and going to the gold country, Ashbel Martin built this cabin where he remained throughout his three and half years in California.<sup>108</sup> Other members of the group came and went, for they considered Ashbel's cabin a homestead they could depend on. This was not an unusual arrangement for Vermonters. Isaac Pollard from Plymouth built a cabin for the use of his friends from home, and Pete Abbott from Ryegate lived with three or four mates "in a little cabin working their claim making about 3 dollars a day besides expenses," cooking their own "grub first rate."<sup>109</sup>

Vermonters stuck together to assuage homesickness, provide society,

and allow the men to share domestic duties. This arrangement may have contributed to the success of these miners. Their mutual support and shared values helped them avoid temptations. The cabin may also have given them the comfort to remain in California longer than those who mined alone or paired with strangers. From Ephraim's description of their activities—arguing and reading—it is obvious they felt a sense of kinship and security with each other. In 1854 they even celebrated the holiday most loved by New Englanders—Thanksgiving. They planned a feast and “hired a lady to make a chicken pie and the other fixings.”<sup>110</sup>

When Ephraim was on the Davis Ranch, he found it hard to attend meeting on the Sabbath as it was a fifteen-mile trek to the closest church. He asked his parents, “how often would you go to Wells River to Meeting think you?” Once settled in White Rock, however, he attended regularly with several of his Peacham cabin mates. They became loyal supporters of the Rev. Mr. James Pierpont, a Presbyterian minister from New England who preached in Placerville.<sup>111</sup> Ephraim was pleased to tell his father that Pastor Pierpont knew of Ephraim's uncle, also named Ephraim W. Clark, who served the American Missionary Board in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). He wrote his parents in June 1853 that Pierpont “is a young man full of energy & I think will do much good. He has every thing to contend with here this is a wicked place.”<sup>112</sup> Ephraim and several other Peacham men helped to construct a church building in Placerville. They even put up a bell, hoping the ringing would remind the miners of their religious practices at home. Other Caledonia County miners helped build churches in California. Alfred Goodenough of Hardwick wrote of a similar joint effort in Downieville, where he had heard only one preacher in five months.<sup>113</sup> The regular practice of attending meeting with friends and neighbors had been transposed from Vermont to California.

At the end of 1854, a California newspaper sent to Peacham listed Ephraim as “Elder E. W. Clark.” This pleased Elisabeth, but their father Russell was not sure how to interpret the news, and when Ephraim asked that his membership be switched from Peacham to this new church, Russell saw a clear signal that his son planned to remain in California. Elisabeth tried to placate their father, but Russell would not be “calmed unless Ephraim came home.” Letters from Peacham began to detail Russell's poor health. Elisabeth wrote in January 1855 that their father “is now rather lame his back & shoulder trouble him a good deal (his old trouble too) if he over dose [it] comes on.” She could not help but add, “yet he is about all the time comes up to the Saturday & prayer meeting—but you can hardly tell how much they [Russell and Aphia] hang upon your coming home.”<sup>114</sup>

In his letters, Ephraim enthusiastically described his participation in circulating petitions and posting handbills in Placerville in an attempt to have a law passed to stop “labor & trade” on the Sabbath. His letters detailed this Sunday-closing law effort but his father never mentioned it. Russell did not want to hear of anything but Ephraim’s arrival date at home.

A recurring theme in the Clark letters to Ephraim in California was real estate. In spring 1854, Russell decided to buy land adjoining his, which he called “the Kinerson pasture.” It had been recently surveyed, reported Aphia Clark to her stepson, and consisted of “15½ acres for which he paid 3 Hundred & ten dollars.”<sup>115</sup> The extra land would allow Russell to graze his cows close by and also to raise his own hay rather than purchase it. He took the advice of neighbors, Constantine Farrow and Asa Sargeant from the Hollow and Lyman Watts from East Part—all good farmers and respected men—who urged him to buy the land. Ephraim did not seem pleased with the purchase because it meant that his father was once more in debt. In his next letter, Ephraim sent one hundred and fifty dollars “that will pay a part of your debt.”<sup>116</sup> However, when adjoining land owned by Thaddeus Stevens, purchased years before for his mother who had recently died, came on the market, Ephraim advised in his July 11, 1854, letter: “My opinion about that Steavens land is that at present prices of real-estate it will not do to purchas at any rate I do not feel inclined to invest money in that land at preasant.” Farm land prices had climbed steadily from about \$10 an acre to more than \$20 since Ephraim had left Peacham.<sup>117</sup>

Like other young men who left home before starting a courtship, Ephraim called on his sister for help in that area. Elisabeth responded in January 1854: “As to the pretty girls I should not dare recommend any till you have an opportunity of seeing them & Judging for your self.”<sup>118</sup> Nothing more was written on this subject.

#### DEATH IN CALIFORNIA AND AT HOME

One fear shared by miners in California and their families at home was death. Hardly a letter came to the mines that did not list the recent deaths in town. Some who died were elderly men and women who had led full lives. Occasionally, though, the death of a young person occurred—much harder to accept. Ephraim’s older sister Sarah, never in good health, died on June 25, 1853, at age twenty-nine. Elisabeth wrote the sad news to her brother who responded writing to his parents: “Tears have flown apace since opening the letter . . . but what avails our weeping . . . Sarahs earthly career is ended her sufferings here are ended her spirit is gone to the God that gave it.”<sup>119</sup>

Sometimes miners learned of the death of loved ones at home through letters to fellow miners. In a letter dated August 22, 1852, Ephraim reported on the response to three Peacham deaths: Michael Kavanagh, upon hearing of the death of his young daughter, called her “his pride but the flower is plucked before it was fairly blown”; John Ewell, who lost a sister, “talked very well about it & he seemed to feel the uncertainty of life”; Mark Varnum, learning of the death of his aunt, the mother of eleven children, “thought it would be a great shock to his Uncle Simons folks that Death has for the first time entered that family.”<sup>120</sup>

News of the death of fellow miners hit hard on both coasts. When notified by the family, *The Caledonian* reported the details, often quoting from the letter announcing the tragedy to the parents or wife. Through 1849 the paper reported the deaths in California of seven Vermonters.<sup>121</sup> In 1850 *The Caledonian* reported twenty-one death notices of Vermont miners who died in California, including from Caledonia County: Edson Howe and Gilbert Ladd of Danville, Norman Davis and Hiram Kellogg of Hardwick. The murder of Norman Davis and seven others from the company of thirty-one men who were crossing overland was reported in detail by C. M. Spencer, Norman’s “mess-mate,” whose letter to the family was printed in the newspapers. The men were attacked outside El Paso by “a hostile body of Indians numbering from three to four hundred.”<sup>122</sup> The news of Gilbert Ladd’s death on January 25, 1850, came from a letter written by one of his fellow passengers on the ship *Capitol*, which they took out of Boston. The writer noted that Gilbert “has shared the fate of thousands of other California emigrants” and reported that fourteen of the group that had sailed together “to his knowledge have already deceased.” Maybe to investigate his son’s death, Seneca Ladd and another son sailed for California within a few months.<sup>123</sup>

In 1851 the local newspaper reported the deaths of nine Vermont gold seekers; in 1852, twenty; in 1853, seventeen. Since most obituaries in those years were brief one-liners, the editor may have felt the need to elaborate on the subject of death in California. In fall 1852, he published an eleven-verse poem titled “DIED IN CALIFORNIA.” The first verse began with “Oh Death! Thou hast had thy cruel sway, Where the Sacramento’s tide is rolled, And the south wind brings on its wings today, A mournful dirge from the land of gold.” Another verse spoke to those contemplating the trip: “Oh! Ye who dream of the golden land, And fain would glean of its yellow ore, Leave not the wealth of your quiet homes, To die on that pestilential shore.”<sup>124</sup>

One miner’s death stands out and is remembered even today. Peachamite Newell Marsh left for California in March 1852, and he died

there on November 20, 1852. His plan was to help his mother reduce the debts his father, Jonathan Marsh, had left when he died in June 1849.<sup>125</sup> Ephraim Clark must have known Newell; Russell and Aphia Clark certainly knew his mother, Sarah Kimball Marsh. In a letter to Ephraim, Russell described the Peacham response to the death of twenty-year-old Newell Marsh:

Far, Far! from home & friends and all that was near and dear, in Shasta City (or village) Newel Marsh lingered about 3 weeks and *died!* . . . . Oh I cannot picture to you the Scenes in that family on the reception of this *letter!* They had been long looking for a letter & now they had got one. It was a *large one* & there was gold in it. Opened, a lock of hair fell out that is to put in the locket said one. They began to *read!!!* You may *immagin!* I cannot *describe!*—we all feel to sympathize with *them* and such a sermon as we had on this occasion, how I wishes you could have heard it.<sup>126</sup>

In January 1853, Rev. Asaph Boutelle, pastor at the Peacham Congregational Church, preached a funeral sermon for Newell from James 4:13–14<sup>127</sup> and began with: “It is said young Marsh was ambitious, loved adventure, and thought in a foreign land exertion would be better rewarded than at home. He was disappointed.” The minister presented an idea that might have made his congregation squirm:

Some perhaps may say he [Newell Marsh] sacrificed his life in pursuit of wealth. His going to California is no proof of this. One may as well go there as to China, or Paris, or London, to engage in business. It is the motive men have in acting, which gives character to their doings, not the place where they live and die . . . . To get property by mining is as honest as to get it by farming, or trading. The love of money is the root of all evil, and that may exist in our rural homes as strongly as in lands far from home.

In closing, Boutelle quoted a statistic that must have rung through the county: “The proportion of deaths in Vermont was in 1850 about one in 100, while of those who went out from us to California, one in 20 died last year.”<sup>128</sup> Speaking to those contemplating a trip to the California mines, he said:

This event [Marsh’s death] also reminds those who expect soon to follow him to that strange land, where to dig, to traffic, to get gain, charging them to act soberly in all things, and not to be too confident of final success. It does not forbid you to go, but it confirms the idea, “ye know not what shall be on the morrow,” and subordinate all calculations and aspirings to the will of God.<sup>129</sup>

In the twenty-first century, Newell Marsh is remembered by those who walk through the Peacham Cemetery, for in the old section near the graves of the early ministers stands the Marsh family monument. On the handsome stone facing west is clearly engraved:

NEWELL MARSH

JULY 20, 1832

NOVEMBER 20, 1852

INTERMENT IN SHASTA CITY, CAL

Some other gravestones in Vermont record California deaths.<sup>130</sup>

By 1852 the gold mania had died down somewhat but the fever continued, as a scattering of gold seekers left Caledonia County for California throughout the 1850s.

#### RETURN OF THE STRAGGLERS

Caledonia County boys often began returning to Vermont after only one season of digging in California. If a wife remained at home, like Charlotte Sanborn or Sarah Walbridge Way, the husband's stay in the mines was as short as possible. Single men tended to linger longer. All were conscious that they had to set aside enough money for the return trip, and most wanted a little more to justify the journey and to salvage their pride. One miner wrote, "If it had not been for my *pride*, I should have been home long ago."<sup>131</sup> After deciding to return, a miner sold any claim he had not tapped out, left for San Francisco, and from there boarded a steamer down the Pacific coast. By 1855 a railroad that crossed the isthmus at Panama allowed homebound travelers to be back in Vermont within a month. This route became the favored one. Some returnees stopped in New York and "fixed" themselves up with haircuts, shaves, and new clothes, and often bought gifts for those at home. Landing in New York, Dustan Walbridge wrote of the high prices: "Every thing is high here . . . many things higher to us returned Californians for they know us in a moment and think to get big prices out of us."<sup>132</sup> Caledonia County men returned alone or in twos and threes—not in groups as they had assembled to begin their adventure. They no longer needed the reassurance of friends. The gold rush was over for them and home awaited.

Upon returning, most miners accepted the duty of visiting the families of those miners still in California. Eight months after Alfred Rix left in the fall of 1851, Chastina in Peacham noted in her journal: "Josiah Shedd called to see us . . . we were in such a hubbub that I could'nt think of scarcely anything to say or ask of our friends in California."<sup>133</sup> Returning miners brought not only the news of relatives in California, they often hand delivered gifts. In 1854 when Chastina and Clara were settled in San Francisco, the Walbridge sisters sent their mother, Roxana in Peacham, photographs of their new life. Among these was an ambrotype of Clara "in a red velvet case" that Carlos

Sampson carried to the Watts farm.<sup>134</sup> A year later, the daguerreotype of the newly built Rix home on Market Street in San Francisco was presented to Roxana by William Gilfillan. She had expected it, as Clara had written that “Chastina is going to send the Daguerreotype of our house and its inmates to mother.”<sup>135</sup> In fall 1856 Clara, then a newlywed, sent “a small parcel” to Roxana with Phineas Blanchard, containing a piece of “wedding cake . . . not sent for the value but the rarity of the thing.”<sup>136</sup> The folks at home appreciated the gifts carried by returning miners, which helped connect them intimately with their loved ones living so far from home.

Ephraim Clark made it a habit to keep his parents informed of the names of those Caledonia County miners who left California to return home or, as he phrased it, those no longer “Slaves to Gold.” In his letters he mentioned a total of twenty-three men from the Peacham area living in California, and as the men began to plan to leave, he named them. In June 1853, he noted the departure of John Gracy and Jesse Taisey. Later in August, he listed the return of Martin Hidden and William Jennison.<sup>137</sup> His sister, Elisabeth, had already welcomed them back to Peacham and wrote of her delight to shake “by the hand one who was with you but little more than a month ago . . . I mean Mr. Jennison he was an entire stranger to me butt he seems like an old friend now.” Then she reported that “Hidden came to the door last night . . . I was glad to hear that you were so well & kept up so good courage.”<sup>138</sup>

It was a two-sided exchange. His parents let Ephraim know who had arrived home from California. In a letter dated September 15, 1853, his parents told of the return of Mark and Harvey Varnum, Lambert Watts, and Palmer Blanchard. “The Varnums were at meeting today,” Russell wrote. At the end of the year, Ephraim admitted, “Peacham boys are all well as far as I know, they are scattered all over California—I suppose you have quite a number of returned with you at present and still they come.”<sup>139</sup> By spring Sprague Harriman and Benj Fuller had left California, and Ephraim added in his June 12, 1854, letter, “Of course I should like to go with them but I must try a little longer yet.” Ephraim had to decide when it was time for him to leave, not an easy decision when he compared his expectations against the reality of his success. He knew that his decision would affect him the rest of his life.<sup>140</sup>

By early 1855, Ephraim’s father was so consumed with wanting his son home—after all, he needed to plan his spring work—that when Russell learned of the arrival of William Gibson, one of Ephraim’s occasional cabin mates, he started for Ryegate hoping to learn “what news he could hear” about Ephraim’s return. Therein began a day of Mr. Clark and William chasing—but never catching up with each other—



*Two returned miners, Ephraim W. Clark (1829–1900) on the left and Ashbel Martin (1830–1899) on the right, photographed with the principal of the Peacham Academy, Thomas Scott Pearson. In 1856 when the daguerreotype was taken, Ephraim and Ashbel must have been celebrated as among the most successful graduates of the school. Gold mined in California was often made into jewelry for gifts to family members at home, and here Ashbel wears a gold ring—probably mined himself. Daguerreotype, courtesy Peacham Historical Association.*

in Barnet, Ryegate, Peacham Corner, and Peacham Hollow. In her next letter, Elisabeth described their father circling William, who had been “pretty well questioned up the day he was going round to see the boys friends.” She was sorry he missed their father. She thanked Ephraim “for those precious keep sakes you sent us by Mr. Gibson—that beautiful ring is now on my finger, it is so conspicuous that every one says why you have got a new ring.” Besides the ring for his sister, Ephraim had sent a specimen pin for Lafayette. These gifts, Elisabeth wrote, were “doubly precious because they were dug by your own hand.”<sup>141</sup>

Much as Ephraim Clark wanted to try for more gain, he decided to leave as the rains ceased in the spring of 1855. After three and a half years in California, he ended his adventure. His family expressed their

joy, as anticipated by Elisabeth, “in finding the lost sheep” at home.<sup>142</sup> No record of the family reunion exists, but it is not hard to imagine the happy faces in the Clark pew at meeting the following Sabbath.

The success Ephraim and his fellow miners achieved can be partially traced after their return to Vermont through the town grand lists. Based on these Peacham town records, Ephraim Clark eliminated the debt on his father’s farm, expanded their land holdings, and according to the 1856 grand list, came home with \$500, in addition to the \$900 he had sent from California. Ashbel Martin also did well, purchasing a good farm adjoining his father’s homestead in Peacham.<sup>143</sup> Martin Hidden returned with a little more than \$300; William Jennison, with \$500. John Eastman and Fowler Ford had their stories of adventure but no added dollars in the bank. Bailey Watts enjoyed better luck on his second trip to California, recording \$1,000 in the 1855 grand list. One from this small group of friends died in California. No details are known, only the fact that Leonard Martin died in September 1852 in Sly Park, California.<sup>144</sup> In total, five of the eight stragglers returned with earnings, two had no gain, and one died.

#### CONCLUSION

The stereotype of the gold rush experience is for the most part a negative one. Miners are pictured as rushing to California; losing what little money they had in gambling and poor claims; severing their ties with families back home, partly in shame of their financial failure but also their guilt for improper conduct; and living out their lives in loneliness and poverty in a strange land. This image does not fit the Caledonia County men; just the opposite. These men borrowed enough money to survive and when they ran low on money in California, they hired out, often away from the mines. They maintained their ties to family through letters and sent gifts home with returning townsmen. They sent money to help support their families. They reported on each other—not in terms of financial success or failure—but noting the men they had seen and the state of their health. They looked out for each other and helped in times of sickness and hardship. The success of the Caledonia County miners can be attributed to these qualities: close family ties, strong religious beliefs, commitment to their network of friends from home, and Yankee work ethic.

The California gold rush produced the largest number of primary sources up to that time written by American men and boys. The story of this experience is told many times over. And although the themes may repeat themselves, the personal story is unique for each miner. The Caledonia County miners describe in their letters and diaries loneliness,

illness, death, wretched conditions, and expectations not met. They also describe achieving financial independence, accepting adult responsibility, organizing daily work schedules, and learning to articulate through writing about their activities and—in some cases—their emotions.

The names of Caledonia County men mentioned in family letters and diaries, newspaper accounts, and town histories who went to the gold fields before 1855 add up to 208. The number identified as being from Peacham is 65; Ryegate, 40; Barnet, 26; Danville, 25; Walden, 15; Hardwick, 13; Marshfield, 4; St. Johnsbury, 3; Groton and Waterford, 2 each; Cabot, Plainfield, and Sheffield, 1 each; unidentified town, 10. Many more may have sought the riches of California, but since this subject has been researched very little, as evidenced by its lack of coverage in the many Vermont town histories, the actual figure is unknown.<sup>145</sup>

In New England, the tale of the California gold rush faded quickly as historical events brewing through the 1850s led to the Civil War, which became the major nineteenth-century story for the whole country. The War touched every family, poor and wealthy, church going and not, farmer and professional. Throughout Caledonia County, there are monuments to the men who died in the Civil War. Little remains to remember the men who left home and family to travel thousands of miles in search of gold in California.

An analysis of only the fifty members of the three companies of men for whom documentation is fairly complete reveals that thirty-six or 72 percent returned to Vermont. The significance of family and community in bringing these men back, however, was not the end of their search for a better life. Home drew back the miners from California, but the reality of economic hardship in Caledonia County pushed many to continue their search for stability. Sixteen returned miners moved their families to the Midwest before or shortly after the Civil War.<sup>146</sup>

Of the fifty California miners in these three groups, four died, one went on to Australia, three settled permanently in California, and six are unaccounted for. Twenty-five or 69 percent of the returned miners came back with at least \$300, an amount that would be considered what a man could have earned as a hired hand in Vermont for two years.<sup>147</sup> In addition, miners had paid approximately \$150 for their return trip.

As years went by, some of the families of successful miners took pride in their gold-digging ancestors. Descendants of Ashbel Martin pointed to the large farm spread on the hill of Peacham's Green Bay Loop and said "that's the farm bought with California gold." Likewise, family members of Joel Sanborn pointed to the big house in North Danville enlarged with earnings from the gold rush. Joel's great granddaughter reported that all of his children—and he had eight including

one born while he was in California—“got gold for a wedding present and loans as needed.”<sup>148</sup> One Peacham man, Charles A. Choate, after returning from the California gold fields, kept a diary off and on for nearly forty years. Settling on a farm in West Barnet, he wrote on Christmas day 1879: “Have been at home all day am about sick but have had to work all day doing chores which is about the way I have celebrated Christmas and all other holidays since I left California.”<sup>149</sup> After many years, Charles still thought of his California days.

Those who remained in California continued to value their Vermont roots. Throughout the nineteenth century, they attended the meetings and picnics of Vermonters in the San Francisco Bay area in large numbers.<sup>150</sup> Those who returned to Vermont, looking back on their great adventure, must surely have shared the thoughts of Seneca Ladd of Danville, who wrote: “California—there never was one before it and I think there will never be another.”<sup>151</sup>

## NOTES

A version of this article was presented on July 11, 2004, as part of a public lecture program of the St. Johnsbury Archives Collaborative sponsored by the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium and the Vermont Humanities Council under Project Director Selene Colburn. For help in researching and writing this article, the author thanks Allen F. Davis, William (Bill) Ferraro, Deborah Duncan Hudson, Gary F. Kurutz, and Karen R. Lewis; for technical assistance, thanks to Conor Casey; for transcribing the Clark letters and many others, thanks to Janet B. Smith. Town clerks from Barnet, Cabot, Danville, Marshfield, Peacham, and Walden were helpful; also the staff at the Caledonia County Probate Office. A special thank you goes to Lynne Z. Bassett, costume and textile historian and museum consultant, for information on fashions in the photographs.

Throughout this article, the author has followed the editorial practice for reproducing quotes from letters and diaries by retaining the original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Words added to the quotes have been placed in brackets.

<sup>1</sup> Gary F. Kurutz’s introduction in Fern L. Henry, *My Checkered Life: Luzena Stanley Wilson in Early California* (Nevada City, Calif.: Carl Mautz Publishing, 2003), v.

<sup>2</sup> J. S. Holliday, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 53.

<sup>3</sup> *The Caledonian* (St. Johnsbury, Vt.), 18 May 1850. Not until 1855 were stamps issued by the federal government. The author is indebted to the staff of the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, especially Library Director Lisa von Kann, for preserving and making available *The Caledonian*.

<sup>4</sup> *The North Star* (Danville, Vt.), 25 September 1848. Susannah Clifford, *Village in the Hills: A History of Danville, Vermont 1796–1995* (West Kennebunk, Me.: Phoenix Publishing, 1995), 89.

<sup>5</sup> *The Caledonian*, 9 and 16 December 1848, printed the complete message. California gold is mentioned only in the first part of the speech.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 December 1848.

<sup>7</sup> *The North Star*, 1 February 1851. As early as 13 January 1849 *The North Star* wished the miners “good luck” and teasingly requested they “send us a small quantity of the gold dust—say a bushel or two.”

<sup>8</sup> Lewis D. Stilwell, *Migration from Vermont* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1948), 212. Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Yankee Exodus: An Account of Migration from New England* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950), 152, 157. Lists of Vermonters going to the California gold mines can be found in *Branches & Twigs*, Bulletin of the Genealogical Society of Vermont (Autumn 1991): 127–129, which includes 112 names gathered from *The North Star* (Danville) and *The Vermont Watchman* (Montpelier). The author is grateful to Martha Whittaker, librarian of The Sutro Library, San Francisco, for pointing out this publication.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census, 1850. The most populous cities in Vermont were located in the southern or western parts of the state.

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<sup>10</sup>R. C. Smith, Hardwick, Vt., to Dustin Cheever, Barton, Vt., 22 December 1851, Dustin Cheever Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, partly quoted in Allen F. Davis, "Hardwick, Vermont, to Clinton, Wisconsin: The Story of Dustin Grow Cheever," *Vermont History* 34 (October 1961): 228.

<sup>11</sup>*The Caledonian*, 22 December 1849, published the letter by J. Jewett written from San Francisco on 19 October 1849.

<sup>12</sup>Clara Walbridge, New York, to relatives, Peacham, Vt., 19 January 1853, Private Collection, hereafter cited as PC referring to several collections held in private hands. Nineteenth-century family members were often referred to as "friends."

<sup>13</sup>Russell K. Rogers, Placerville, Calif., to unidentified person, 23 June 1853, copy in Rix Family Papers, California Historical Society; quoted in Lynn A. Bonfield and Mary C. Morrison, *Roxana's Children: The Biography of a Nineteenth-Century Vermont Family* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 89.

<sup>14</sup>Gary F. Kurutz, *The California Gold Rush: A Descriptive Bibliography of Books and Pamphlets Covering the Years 1848-1853* (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1997). E-mail from Gary Kurutz to the author, 14 December 2004.

<sup>15</sup>*The North Star*, 19 May and 22 September 1849, letters written by Gilbert Ladd, 8 March 1849 and 24 July 1849, to his father, Seneca Ladd, Danville, Vt. *The Caledonian*, 27 June 1900, published an obituary for Milo J. Ayer, which reported that twenty-five young men from Caledonia County started for California from Boston in January 1849.

<sup>16</sup>*The North Star*, 1 February 1850. According to the newspaper, this Barnet group included: Thomas Gilkerson, A. H. Brock, Joel Brock, James D. Shaw, William Shaw, David Gilfillan, Luther Gilkerson, Wm. W. Goodwillie, Wm. Roy, 2d, and Robert McLerran. The spelling of the latter name has varied in newspapers and family letters. The author of this article uses McLaren as seen in Frederic Palmer Wells, *History of Barnet, Vermont* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Printing Co., 1923).

<sup>17</sup>Davis, "Hardwick, Vermont," 228.

<sup>18</sup>*The Caledonian*, 6 November 1852. Joel Sanborn letters, December 1852, quoted in Gerald W. LaMothe, "One Village—Two Centuries—Several Families: An Oral and Documentary History of North Danville" (MA Thesis, Dartmouth College, May 2002), 2–11.

<sup>19</sup>Clara Walbridge, 19 January 1853, PC.

<sup>20</sup>*The Caledonian*, 23 April 1853.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 May 1849.

<sup>22</sup>"Daily Journal of Alfred and Chastina W. Rix," 6 March 1852, Rix Family Papers, California Historical Society; hereafter cited as Rix Journal. Chastina may have meant Henry Harriman and his brother-in-law, Carlos Sampson. Sampson eventually made it to California.

<sup>23</sup>*The Caledonian*, 3 February 1849.

<sup>24</sup>California Company Contract, 1849, PC. The author is indebted to Christopher K. Way for sharing this document and other material on the Way family.

<sup>25</sup>Maxine Martin Long, compiler, *Descendants of the Hon. Moses Martin of Peacham, Vermont, A Martin Genealogy* (1985), 3.

<sup>26</sup>Unless noted otherwise, Peacham vital dates are from Jennie Chamberlain Watts and Elsie A. Choate, compilers, *People of Peacham* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1965). Barnet family genealogy is from Wells, *History of Barnet, Vermont*. Ryegate information is from Edward Miller and Frederic P. Wells, *History of Ryegate, Vermont* (St. Johnsbury: The Caledonian Company, 1912). Additional vital dates come from death notices indexed in Anne Kendall Smith and Stuart E. Smith, compilers of *Vital Statistics from St. Johnsbury Caledonian*. Vital information has also been searched in the town clerk's offices where vital statistics and cemetery records are kept.

<sup>27</sup>Records for Caledonia County Grammar School, where students attended the equivalent of high school, are fairly complete in the 1840s and 1850s, Peacham Historical Association. Unfortunately, the archives from Danville's Phillips Academy have not been located. Harold M. Long, "Early Schools of Peacham," Peacham Historical Association, 1971, lists twelve district schools for the lower grades in Peacham in 1850.

<sup>28</sup>Clara Walbridge, San Francisco, to her stepbrother, Charles Watts, Peacham, Vt., 30 March 1855, PC.

<sup>29</sup>Unfortunately, nineteenth-century grand lists no longer exist for Barnet, Cabot, Danville, Ryegate, and Walden. Town clerks of Danville and Walden say fires destroyed these early records.

<sup>30</sup>Rix Journal, 6 January 1850; quoted in Bonfield and Morrison, *Roxana's Children*, 44. Ernest L. Bogart, *Peacham, the Story of a Vermont Hill Town* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1948), 226, mistakenly gives the starting date of this company as 1849.

<sup>31</sup>*The Caledonian*, 19 January 1850. The paper mistakenly listed Alex McLaren as Abel McLaren. The author did not find James Walbridge in the Marshfield town clerk records; he was found in the Cabot records, *Births Marriages Deaths*, Vol. 1, 1788–1881, p. 72, as son of Ames and Rachel Walbridge, born 16 May 1819.

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<sup>32</sup> Roxana Walbridge Watts, Peacham, Vt., to relatives in the West, 22 April 1850, Walbridge-Gregory Family Papers, California Historical Society; quoted in Bonfield and Morrison, *Roxana's Children*, 44. The Peacham grand list does not verify John S. Way's finances. John may have been one of those who did not keep his money in banks or stocks and thus the town would have no record of his wealth.

<sup>33</sup> John S. Way, Panama, to Sarah Walbridge Way, Peacham, Vt., 1 February 1850, PC.

<sup>34</sup> Jo Ann Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), xvi, gives a good definition of seeing the elephant.

<sup>35</sup> John S. Way, San Francisco, to Sarah Walbridge Way, Peacham, Vt., 21 February 1850, PC; quoted in part in Bonfield and Morrison, *Roxana's Children*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> John S. Way, Hangtown, Calif., to Sarah Walbridge Way, Peacham, Vt., 7 April 1850, PC.

<sup>37</sup> *The North Star*, 13 April 1850, cites a letter from Danville's Chester Martin, one of John Way's company, saying that "if a person at home is comfortably situated and doing a fair business, he had better not start for California."

<sup>38</sup> *The Caledonian*, 1 December 1849.

<sup>39</sup> John S. Way, Georgetown, Calif., to Sarah Walbridge Way, Peacham, Vt., 21 June 1850, PC.

<sup>40</sup> Bogart, *Peacham*, 226, a fact he gives without footnote. Holliday, *The World Rushed In*, 97–98, writes that it was common for companies to disband, some even before arriving in San Francisco but most within a few months of beginning to mine.

<sup>41</sup> *The Caledonian*, 9 February 1851, estimates the cost of "passage and outfit" at \$350. According to the Consumer Price Index at the Economic History Resources website, the sum of three hundred dollars in 1850 is worth \$7,023 in 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Erwin G. Gudde, *California Gold Camps* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 375.

<sup>43</sup> *The Caledonian*, 10 August 1850, letter written from Wood's Creek, Calif., 19 May 1850.

<sup>44</sup> John S. Way, Georgetown, Calif., to Sarah Walbridge Way, Peacham, Vt., 21 June 1850, PC.

<sup>45</sup> *The North Star*, 1 June 1850.

<sup>46</sup> Rix Journal, 14 August 1850; quoted in Bonfield and Morrison, *Roxana's Children*, 46.

<sup>47</sup> *The Caledonian*, 31 August 1850.

<sup>48</sup> *The North Star*, 8 March 1851.

<sup>49</sup> William Gedney Walbridge, compiler, *Descendants of Henry Walbridge Who Married Anna Amos December 25th 1688 at Preston, Conn.* (Litchfield, Conn., 1898), 121–122. The disappearance of James M. Walbridge was not reported in the local newspapers.

<sup>50</sup> There is some discrepancy about A. A. Wheeler. The company contract and the newspaper list him as A. A. Wheeler, seemingly Alexander Wheeler, a furniture maker according to Bogart, *Peacham*, 266. Another listing of men who went to California with John Way, however, names him Addison Wheeler; obituary, unidentified Northfield, Minnesota, newspaper, 17 January 1909. Watts and Choate, *People of Peacham*, includes Alexander Wheeler but no Addison Wheeler. Neither Alexander nor Addison Wheeler is found after 1849 in local newspapers or family letters.

<sup>51</sup> Jane Hallberg, Leone Howe, and Mary Jane Gustafson, *History of the Earle Brown Farm* (Brooklyn [Minnesota] Historical Society), 4–5, includes a history of the John Martin family but mistakenly attributes all of the gold in the valise as belonging to John rather than belonging to at least four of the miners. The author is indebted to Maxine Martin Long for a copy of this history and other material on the Martin family.

<sup>52</sup> Rix Journal, 21 September 1850; quoted in Bonfield and Morrison, *Roxana's Children*, 46. Gary F. Kurutz suggested to the author that Alfred may have been describing gold pieces or coins, as by 1849 ten- and twenty-dollar gold coins were being minted in San Francisco, e-mail 27 July 2005.

<sup>53</sup> *The Caledonian*, 12 June 1852, reported that James G. White died in Peacham at age thirty-seven of "canker-rash and scarlet fever."

<sup>54</sup> Roxana Walbridge Watts, Peacham, Vt., to relatives in the West, 27 December 1850, Walbridge-Gregory Family Papers. Alfred S. Rix, San Francisco, to John S. Way, Hardwick, Vt., 22 May 1853, PC.

<sup>55</sup> Unidentified newspaper, 17 January 1909, obituary for John S. Way reported that "in company with some of the same men who had been with him . . . in California . . . he brought his family to the territory of Minnesota in 1855." Hallberg, *Earle Brown Farm*, 4. Sarah Walbridge Way, Northfield, Minn., to Alice Watts, Peacham, Vt., 27 October 1861, PC.

<sup>56</sup> Rix Journal, 24–30 September 1851.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 October 1851. Chastina carefully listed the names and towns of each departing man.

<sup>58</sup> Isaac Pollard, *Diary*, 29 August 1853, Vermont Historical Society, MSC 107.

<sup>59</sup> Bogart, *Peacham*, 264.

<sup>60</sup> T. D. Seymour Bassett, *The Growing Edge: Vermont Villages, 1840–1880* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1992), 76.

<sup>61</sup> *The Caledonian*, 10 August 1850.

<sup>62</sup> Rix Journal, 20 January and 31 October 1851.

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<sup>63</sup> *The Caledonian*, 18 May 1898; on the occasion of their “Golden Wedding,” the paper gives a brief biography of Dr. John Brock Darling and Margaret Shaw Darling.

<sup>64</sup> Rix Journal, pages written after the first entry, 29 August 1849, in a section giving the autobiographies of Alfred and Chastina.

<sup>65</sup> Alfred S. Rix, San Francisco, to Lyman and Roxana Walbridge Watts, Peacham, Vt., 26 June 1852, Edward A. Rix Collection, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 June 1852, and Alfred’s summary of his time since leaving Vermont written in their journal after the entry for 11 May 1853.

<sup>67</sup> Rix Journal, 5 and 30 June 1852.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Roberts, San Francisco, to Mathilda Roberts, Walden, Vt., 3 August 1852, *Vermont Quarterly* XX (April 1952), 2:128.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, (July 1952), 3:209, Mathilda to Andrew, 4 September 1852.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, (October 1952), 4:295–297, Mathilda to Andrew, 4 December 1852.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 300–301, Mathilda to Andrew, 30 January 1853.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 302, Mathilda to Andrew, 27 February 1853.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, XXI (January 1953), 1:42–43, Andrew to Mathilda, 7 May 1853.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, 38. According to the Walden Land Records, Andrew and Matilda Roberts purchased a farm 26 October 1853.

<sup>75</sup> Rix Journal, 2 and 4 April 1854.

<sup>76</sup> *The Caledonian*, 8 November 1851.

<sup>77</sup> J. S. Holliday, *Rush for Riches: Gold Fever and the Making of California* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 164. *The Caledonian*, 26 March 1853.

<sup>78</sup> Clara Walbridge, Peacham, Vt., to her brother, D. Augustus Walbridge, East Hardwick, Vt., 4 October 1851, PC.

<sup>79</sup> Dustan Walbridge, San Francisco, to John S. Way, Hardwick, Vt., 2 April 1853, PC.

<sup>80</sup> Roxana Walbridge Watts, Peacham, Vt., to John and Sarah Walbridge Way, Northfield, Minn., 27 May 1855, PC.

<sup>81</sup> Letter written by Alfred S. Rix, San Francisco, to Lyman Watts, Peacham, Vt., 30 June 1853, PC. At the same time, Clara, who also had borrowed money from her stepfather, repaid her loan to him.

<sup>82</sup> Ashbel Martin, California, to his family, Peacham, Vt., 6 February 1852, PC.

<sup>83</sup> Dustan Walbridge, San Francisco, to Alice Watts, Peacham, Vt., 12 September 1854, PC.

<sup>84</sup> Dustan Walbridge, San Francisco, to Roxana Walbridge Watts, Peacham, Vt., 3 November 1856, PC.

<sup>85</sup> Clara Walbridge, San Francisco, to Sarah Walbridge Way, Northfield, Minn., 29 November 1853. “Society” was the word used to mean the social scene back home where young men and women participated in sugaring-off parties, sleigh riding, horseback riding, picnics, and calling. Dustan and many of the young men who went to California feared they would miss those courting rituals of village life.

<sup>86</sup> For more information on Dustan’s life, see Bonfield and Morrison, *Roxana’s Children*, 122–134.

<sup>87</sup> Chastina Walbridge Rix, San Francisco, to relatives, Peacham, Vt., 14 June 1854, Edward A. Rix Collection. She and Alfred went to Sacramento to visit Alfred’s cousin, Sidney Rix, who died in May 1854. Alfred’s older brother, Oscar Rix, who had joined the Caledonia County men in New York, died in 1859 in San Francisco. Guy S. Rix, compiler, *History and Genealogy of the Rix Family of America* (New York: The Grafton Press, 1906), 41, 92–93.

<sup>88</sup> Clara Walbridge, San Francisco, to D. Augustus Walbridge, Lyndon Corner, Vt., 8 March 1853, PC. Michael Kavanagh succeeded in Australia, as reported by his agent in Peacham who listed him with \$900 in 1856 in the grand list.

<sup>89</sup> Alfred S. Rix, San Francisco, to Chastina Walbridge Rix, Peacham, Vt., 26 June 1852, Edward A. Rix Collection.

<sup>90</sup> Lafayette Strobridge, Peacham, Vt., to his brother-in-law, Ephraim W. Clark, California, 1 January 1854, an addendum to his wife’s letter, 31 December 1853, Clark Collection, Peacham Historical Association. The town records show no gain for John Gracy.

<sup>91</sup> *The Caledonian*, obituary, 3 May 1895.

<sup>92</sup> Caledonia County Probate Records, 26 March 1864. James and Verna Varnum in an interview with the author, summer 2003, told stories of the Varnum boys going to California. Mark apparently crossed the plains with a team of oxen that he found slow going and soon exchanged for a horse. Mark and Harvey’s brother, George, also took the overland route, as verified by a letter to his father published in *The North Star*, 22 February 1850. George received his share of his father’s estate and eventually settled in the West, as did Mark and Harvey.

<sup>93</sup> Bogart, *Peacham*, 227, mistakenly dates this letter as 1852. Since John Blanchard noted forty-two men coming to California with him, he included those who joined the group after Alfred Rix made the list that Chastina entered in their journal. These men may have met up with Alfred’s company in New York or San Francisco.

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<sup>94</sup> U.S. Census, Walden, Vt., 1850, data collected August 1850. His wife Betsey was thirty-seven and the five children, all girls, ranged from one to eleven years. The author thanks Larry Jensen for researching the census records. The Walden Land Records, Vol. 7, p. 501, documents William Jennison's leasing his farm land to Myron K. Norris for two years, signed 14 October 1851. Norris paid \$30 each year and "agrees to carry on farm in a good husbandlike manner, and not waste or destroy fences or timber."

<sup>95</sup> *The Caledonian*, 7 July 1849. Years after Charles A. Choate returned from California, his wife wrote in a letter from their farm in West Barnet that he "never had been contented here, and I believe that few who have been to Cal. ever do come to Vt and enjoy living in it." Alice Watts Choate, West Barnet, Vt., to her half sister, Sarah Walbridge Way, Northfield, Minn., 14 May 1874, PC.

<sup>96</sup> The Clark letters were donated in 1999 to the Peacham Historical Association by Helen Clark Severinghaus, granddaughter of the miner Ephraim W. Clark.

<sup>97</sup> These figures are from the 1850 Peacham grand list. The U.S. Agriculture Census lists Russell Clark with 115 acres of improved land and 25 unimproved acres with a total cash value of \$1,200. This is from the year ending 1 June 1850. It is unclear why this acreage differs from the record in the grand list.

<sup>98</sup> The author is grateful to David E. L. Brown and the late Mary C. Morrison for pointing out these religious references.

<sup>99</sup> Ephraim W. Clark, hereafter cited as EWC, New York, to his parents, Peacham, Vt., 28 December 1851, Clark Collection. All Clark letters quoted below are from this collection.

<sup>100</sup> *The North Star*, 8 November 1851; Clifford, *Village in the Hills*, 91.

<sup>101</sup> Alfred Goodenough, Downieville, Calif., to his parents [Hardwick, Vt.], 23 April 1852, Goodenough Family Papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont. Originally seen in Frances Mallary, compiler, *Selections from the Vermont Library of Gertrude Mallary* (Bradford, Vt., 1989), 59–60. The author thanks Chris Burns, Curator of Manuscripts at UVM, for assistance in researching these letters.

<sup>102</sup> The only reference the author found to bad behavior was in Alfred Goodenough, San Francisco, to his parents, 15 February 1853, where he wrote "Edson drinks pretty hard," with no further identification of the man.

<sup>103</sup> Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) makes a good argument that miners came from the middle class, which could raise the money for the trip. Roberts uses Alfred Rix as an example, a good choice, although most details he gives of Rix's family, work, and the Peacham community are incorrect.

<sup>104</sup> EWC, Puto River, Calif., to his parents, Peacham, Vt., 22 August 1852.

<sup>105</sup> Elisabeth Clark Strobridge, Peacham, Vt., to her brother, EWC, Placerville, Calif., 8 November 1852.

<sup>106</sup> EWC does not describe the cost of transporting gold to the East or the exchange of gold dust to currency or check. Holliday, *The World Rushed In*, 378, quotes a miner as paying ten percent for sending money home. Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 250–251, tells of the changes by 1850 in transferring funds from California to the East, usually by bank draft to a bank in the East.

<sup>107</sup> EWC, White Rock, Calif., to his parents, Peacham, Vt., 2 January 1853. Martin Tupper (1810–1899) was a popular English poet, who seemed to epitomize the moral and evangelical spirit of the mid-nineteenth century. Isaac Watts (1674–1748), author of many hymns, wrote *The Improvement of the Mind*, a well-known book of practical theology for everyday life.

<sup>108</sup> Gudde, *California Gold Camps*, 370–371, identifies White Rock Canyon as being about four miles northeast of Placerville, along the South Fork of the American River.

<sup>109</sup> Isaac Pollard, Diary, 28 November 1853. Isaac's cabin was similar to many others built during the gold rush. He described it as being "20 feet long and 14 feet wide, boarded all over, the roof is boarded and battened, a good rough board floor and a large window in one end . . . bed and other fixings as handy as any miner's cabin in the diggings. The lumber cost us \$17.50 (15 hundred feet) the window cost \$4.75 (12 lights 5 x 10)." D. Augustus Walbridge, San Francisco, to his half sister Alice Watts, Peacham, Vt., 28 May 1862, excerpted in Bogart, *Peacham*, 228, reported, "I heard from [Pete] Abbott not long since." In a telephone interview, author with Gwen Hagen, August 1983, Mrs. Hagen confirmed that her relative from Ryegate, Pete Abbott, had gone to California. She added that he "never did anything that didn't make money" and is "said to have run the pony express in California." Pete returned and sold tinware in Ryegate.

<sup>110</sup> Ashbel Martin, White Rock, Calif., to his family, Peacham, Vt., 28 November 1854, PC. Rodman W. Paul, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848–1880* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 23, claims that contemporary diaries suggest that life in the mines was more discouraging "on those who worked and lived alone than on those who shared their troubles and anticipations."

<sup>111</sup> Henry E. Jewett, *Israel Edson Dwinell, D.D.: A Memoir with Sermons* (Oakland, Calif.: W. B.

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Hardy, ca. 1892), 63. Rev. Pierpont is listed as going to California under the auspices of the American Home Missionary Society. The author thanks Beth Champagne for pointing out this book and Shara McCaffrey of the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum staff for locating it.

<sup>112</sup> EWC, White Rock, Calif., to his parents, Peacham, Vt., 26 June 1853.

<sup>113</sup> Alfred Goodenough, Downieville, Calif., to his brother in Vermont, 22 May 1852.

<sup>114</sup> Aphia and Russell Clark, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, 13 January 1855 and Elisabeth Clark Strobridge, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, 14 January 1855. Prayer meeting was held both Tuesday and Saturday in addition to meeting on the Sabbath.

<sup>115</sup> Aphia Clark, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, 22 April 1854.

<sup>116</sup> EWC, California, to his parents, Peacham, Vt., 12 June 1854.

<sup>117</sup> Stilwell, *Migration*, 235–236.

<sup>118</sup> EWC, California, to Elisabeth Clark Strobridge, Peacham, Vt., 9 December 1853, and her reply, January 1854.

<sup>119</sup> Elisabeth Clark Strobridge, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, 15 and 25 June 1853. EWC, California, to parents, Peacham, Vt., 21 August 1853.

<sup>120</sup> The newspaper made no mention of the death of the Kavanagh girl. The notice for the death of Mary Ann Ewell Farnum appeared in *The Caledonian*, 22 May 1852. The death notice for Betsy Varnum Blanchard appeared 1 May 1852.

<sup>121</sup> One of these was Laura Billings Simmons, sister of lawyer Frederick Billings of Woodstock, *The Caledonian*, 24 November 1849.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 February 1850. The letter from C. M. Spencer was dated 12 November 1849.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 March 1850; Clifford, *Village in the Hills*, 90.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 October 1852, poem attributed to “F.B.G. of St. Johnsbury,” probably F. B. Gage, better known as a “daguerreotypist” or “daguerrean artist,” as his ads explained in 1852 when he opened a studio next to the newspaper office.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 August 1849. The Probate Court’s announcement of the sale of land from Jonathan Marsh’s estate “in order to pay debts” appeared in *The Caledonian*, 16 February 1850.

<sup>126</sup> Russell Clark, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, 8 February 1853.

<sup>127</sup> *The Bible*, King James Version, James 4:13–14: “Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

<sup>128</sup> Following the pattern set by the first minister in Peacham, Boutelle served also as town clerk and in that role kept death statistics. Using his figures for 1851 published in *The Caledonian*, 17 April 1852, he listed nineteen deaths, including eight under the age of fifty years. For 1852 Boutelle reported thirty-three deaths with no age breakdown, *ibid.*, 29 January 1853. There was no compilation for 1850 as Rev. David Merrill died in July and Boutelle began in 1851.

<sup>129</sup> Rev. A. Boutelle, *Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Newell Marsh* (Concord, N.H.: McFarland & Jenks, undated), 5–21; listed in Kurutz, *California Gold Rush*, 65–66.

<sup>130</sup> A gravestone in Wolcott records the death in California of John Davis, a relative of Allen F. Davis, to whom the author is indebted for this information.

<sup>131</sup> “A Warning Voice from California” from the *Boston Journal* and reprinted in *The Caledonian*, 3 April 1852. Men’s pride is a common theme in letters written in Peacham about families who went west, endured difficult times, and could not convince the family patriarch to return to New England. Among letters stating this situation is Roxana Walbridge Watts, Peacham, Vt., to her daughter, Sarah Walbridge Way, unidentified place in Minnesota, 27 May 1855, PC.

<sup>132</sup> Dustan Walbridge, New York, to Clara Walbridge Rogers, San Francisco, 14 June 1857, PC.

<sup>133</sup> Rix Journal, 7 June 1852. Josiah Shedd (1830–1897) was the grand nephew of Dr. Josiah Shedd (1781–1851) of Peacham, whom the doctor raised after the boy’s father died in 1842. Frank E. Shedd, *Daniel Shed Genealogy: Ancestry and Descendants of Daniel Shed of Braintree, Massachusetts 1327–1920* (Boston, Published for the Shedd Family Association, 1921), 308, 532.

<sup>134</sup> Alice Watts, Peacham, Vt., to relatives in the West, 15 July 1855, Walbridge-Gregory Family Collection. The author is grateful to Stephen Bloom for the obituary of Carlos Sampson (1831–1916) from *The Eldora* (Iowa) *Herald*, which noted his “taking part in the gold mining excitement” in California before moving to Iowa in 1870.

<sup>135</sup> Clara Walbridge, San Francisco, to Roxana Walbridge Watts, Peacham, Vt., 14 November 1855, PC. This daguerreotype was taken by noted California photographer Robert H. Vance (1825–1876) on August 20, 1855, and is preserved at the Oakland Museum of California.

<sup>136</sup> Clara Walbridge Rogers, San Francisco, to Roxana Walbridge Watts, Peacham, Vt., fall 1856, PC.

<sup>137</sup> EWC, California, to his parents, Peacham, Vt., 23 and 26 June and 10 August 1853. Another religious phrase found in Ephraim’s letters refers to returned miners: “Glad to know that they have got home safe from the land of bondage,” a reference to the Egypt story in Exodus.

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<sup>138</sup> Elisabeth Clark Strobbridge, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, Spring 1853.

<sup>139</sup> EWC, California, to his parents, Peacham, Vt., 9 December 1853.

<sup>140</sup> Rohrbough, *Days of Gold*, 256–266, gives a good description of what miners had to weigh when making the decision to leave California and return home. His history focuses on the home front and what family and community had to endure without sons, husbands, and brothers.

<sup>141</sup> Aphia Clark, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, 10 March 1855, and Elisabeth Clark Strobbridge, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, 14 March 1855.

<sup>142</sup> Elisabeth Clark Strobbridge, Peacham, Vt., to EWC, California, 19 February 1855. The reference is to *The Bible*, Luke 15:4–7.

<sup>143</sup> Long, *A Martin Genealogy*, 34.

<sup>144</sup> Maxine Martin Long, “A Yankee Argonaut,” manuscript, Peacham Historical Association. The local newspapers do not note this death.

<sup>145</sup> The California gold rush is mentioned briefly in the histories of Barnet, Danville, Peacham, and Ryegate. The Civil War is more fully covered, usually a chapter with a listing of the men who served.

<sup>146</sup> They moved to Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. A few returned to California.

<sup>147</sup> Bogart, *Peacham*, 282, reports that “a man engaged in harvesting or haying received \$1.00 a day,” implying that wages were lower the rest of the year. He adds that “an agricultural laborer was paid \$13 a month in 1854.” T. A. Adams, *Wages of Vermont Farm Labor, 1780–1940* (Burlington: Vermont Agricultural Extension Service, Bulletin 507, February 1944), 88, lists farm wages per day with board in 1850 as 67 cents, bringing about \$16 a week for six-day weeks, a higher wage than Caledonia County farmers paid.

<sup>148</sup> Shirley Merchant LaMothe’s quote in LaMothe, “*One Village*,” 13.

<sup>149</sup> Charles A. Choate, *Diary*, 25 December 1879, PC.

<sup>150</sup> Clara Walbridge Rogers, San Francisco, to Sarah Walbridge Way, Northfield, Minn., 25 May 1879, PC. *Pacific Coast Association of the Native Sons of Vermont, San Francisco, Cal. Report for the Years 1878–80 and 1880–81* (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker & Co., 1881), lists regular monthly socials, annual reunions in commemoration of Vermont’s independence on January 16th, and annual picnics and Vermont “Sugaring-off” in the latter part of May. Among the “Resident Active Members” are thirty-four names of men and women born in Caledonia County. Charles T. Morrissey, *Vermont: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 133.

<sup>151</sup> *The North Star*, 8 November 1851; Clifford, *Village in the Hills*, 91.