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FROM VIRGINIA TO CALIFORNIA DURING THE GOLD RUSH

William C. Farnsworth, son of Seba Farnsworth and his wife, Hulda (Shaw) Farnsworth, was born December 21, 1828 in Brooke Co., Virginia. He spent his childhood days under the parental roof, remaining at home until 1849, when, attracted by the discovery of gold in California, he joined a group of seven young men from his native state bound for the gold fields, and after a long and tedious journey of six months reached El Dorado County, California. There he engaged in mining. His letters to his parents were filled with the wonders of California's ideal climate, beautiful scenery, and the great opportunities and possibilities for financial security for all. These letters produced the desired effect, and two years later his father sold his Virginia holdings and accompanied by his wife, seven children, a son-in-law and two nephews, started west, traveling by boat down the Ohio River.

At Steubenville, Ohio, the Farnsworth party were joined by Robert Ramsey and his wife, Cornelia (Shaw) Ramsey, and their four children. Seba Farnsworth and Robert Ramsey were brothers-in-law, their wives were sisters, daughters of William Shaw and his wife, Elizabeth (Hastings) Shaw, natives of Massachusetts, who had settled in Ohio just prior to 1820. The two families traveled down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Missouri, where they separated, the Ramsey family continuing their journey by boat up the Illinois River to Peoria County, where they were to take up residence; the Farnsworth family going overland by covered wagon to California. The experiences of their trip and the early years of life in California, are described in a letter written by John F. Farnsworth, son of Seba Farnsworth, to his cousin, Cecelia Ramsey, then living in Illinois.

"Cave Valley, California
March 28, 1868

"Dear Cousin:

"You may think it strange to receive a letter from me, but Mother has requested me repeatedly to write to you, so I will try in my humble way to comply with her request.

"I will warn you not to expect much of me and then you will not be disappointed when you are through with the perusal of my letter. I will try to portray something of our lives since last we saw you, and to show the life we have led I must go back and review from the beginning.

"From the ever-to-be-remembered year of 1852 when we parted at St. Louis our troubles seemed to commence and from that day on it does seem that we have been blessed with the worst luck that ever fell to one poor family.

"Our trip from St. Louis up to St. Joseph is bright in my memory yet, though long years of toil and trouble have intervened. I cannot point to one pleasant scene, one oasis, to gladden the heart of the wanderer. At, or a few miles above St. Joseph, we all had the measles and such a time as poor Mother had. Stowed away in a little log cabin with only one room, one side of which was occupied with the fireplace, no windows (for that necessary article in a building had not become a fixture of that part of the country yet), one poor

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old rickety door, two inches to small for the opening, where cold could come through and our big fireplace with all its warmth and brightness could not make us comfortable. Now picture to yourself a family of Father, Mother, son-in-law, seven children and two cousins of the male sex, stowed away in one room 12 x 16, without table, bedstead, or chair, and those seven children and two cousins all down with the measles, and you have our mode of life while in Missouri. But I must not dwell here to long. Suffice it to say that after many weary, weary weeks we were all able to start on our long and dangerous journey. And such a journey. I could fill page after page, in my homely way, of the picturesque and poetical beauties here so lavishly displayed by nature, but time and space will not permit, and perhaps your patience might become wearied. "Sickness and sorrow, pain and death" were all experienced on that journey, and if it was not for the "Beautiful" that I have laid away in my heart, I could wish that journey erased from memory forever. But the bitter must go with the sweet.

"We left little Seba on the Plains, not far from Salt Lake. Would that he was resting close by us here. After five weary months of travel fraught with many dangers, troubles, and heart aches, we arrived in California, the El Dorado of the world. I will mention lightly the trip over the grand snow caped Sierra Nevada Mountains, leaving a discription of their rich and beautiful scenery to some abler pen than mine, to our home in California., which is in a little valley of twenty acres or so. It is called Cave Valley from the number of little caves on the mountains around here. Arriving here we found twenty or thirty semi-civilized Americans, three or four log houses, one saw mill, etc.

"We bought one of the log houses for six hundred and fifty dollars. Here we settled down and had those semi-civilized Americans to board who were very little better than the wild savages that were prowling around our cabin every night. This was a poor place for we children but money was plenty and we were in hopes soon to go on to more genial clime. But fatal hope! Sickness visited us again and two more of our little flock were taken; Lydia and little Sarah, the youngest, are lying side by side on a little knoll close by the house. This was a hard blow to poor Mother and it was a long time before she could become reconciled to our loss.

"In the summer of 1855 we built a nice two story frame house and finished it at a cost of seven or eight thousand dollars. We were making money very fast all this time, but bad luck seemed to follow us. In June 1856, less than one year from the time we had finished our house, some fiend in human shape, set the house on fire about two o'clock in the morning and we just barely had time to get out with our lives. The house and almost everything that the heart could wish for within it to make a comfortable home, all of the fruit and shade trees we had planted around it, went up in smoke. Out of all that abundance we did not save one thing, not one suit of clothes did we have in the family. But we had kind neighbors and before the next night we all had something to wear and a place to sleep. Everything was gone. We did not have one thing to start with, but fortune favors the brave and in less than two months we had another house, a little larger and plastered throughout with a hard finish. (I speak of this for it was something new in the mountains for all houses were canvased in those days, and most of that inside and out). But our good

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luck was short lived. Hardly was the house finished and furnished when the local mill was torn down and moved away. The travel on the road which we had depended most on (for we were keeping public house--hotel) ceased altogether. All business here was at an end, so we had to turn to something else for a livelihood. It was a lonesome place to live but what could we do? There was our home, our all, we could not leave it and go elsewhere, so we turned our attention to farming as the most lucrative business we could find. The mountains around us afforded splendid feed and good water so we stood a fair chance to make it pay, and from 1856 to 1862 we lived a farmer's life, with a little romance once-in-a-while to change the monotony of our lives, for during those years Lizzie, Hattie and Clara were all married to good and worthy men. William was living in Sacramento City at this time and Father, Mother and I were all alone. The winter of 1861-1862 was one of the severest ever experienced in this county. The stock died off by the thousands and many a poor man lost their all that winter. In the fall of 1861 we had stock that was worth between four and five thousand dollars, and we had grain and hay in our barns worth another four thousand dollars. By the spring of 1862 all we had left of all that property were seven hundred dollars worth of stock, but could not save it. I bought hay that spring for one hundred dollars per ton to feed to the stock. What would you think of that in Illinois?

"But we still had our beautiful home; the orchard, grape vines and shrubery were all having a charming effect on us and binding us closer to the old homestead, for there is nothing so pleasant here in the summer time as a nice cool shade and the delicious fruit of this climate, and we had all that, even orange trees that Mother had raised. The house was covered with grape vines, and rose bushes sweet with their wealth of roses, cool arbors, pleasant walks and fruit in abundance. All this we had left, and with strong hands and willing hearts we went to work again to lay aside something for a rainy day.

"We thought our bad luck must soon cease, but the future proved that it had not. Everything was going along nicely until the 6th of last June (1867) when our house caught fire and burned to the ground; nothing was saved out of the pleasant home--only a pile of smoking ashes, where only the day before we had all been so happy. The home that had been built as a haven of rest where Mother and Father could end their days in peace and comfort, for the frosts of many winters are on their heads, was gone and their dreams with it. What a blow. We have built a little house close by the ruins, just large enough for Mother, Father and me. Here perhaps we will spend the rest of our days and I will try to do all that I can to make them happy in their old age.

"You must excuse me if I have written to much but when I look back on the past my heart is full of unspoken thoughts and I must give them utterance. To you, dear cousin, who is a schoolmistress, my language may sound rough and uncouth and my spelling even worse. But when you reflect that I was but thirteen years old when I left Virginia and have had only three months of schooling since then and all those passed in toil and hardship in a mountainous country where all is rough, far away from all the refinements of a city life, you will pass over all of the defects you may find in my letter and "not view with a critic eye but pass my imperfections by." When we came here there were no schools closer than Sacramento City, fifty miles away, and no one

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would think of sending children that far away from home. When schools did come closer I had something else to do for we have had very hard luck since we came to this country. I should have written long before this but must confess that fear of your criticism has kept me from it, for I am mortally afraid of the fair sex, especially when they are school marm!

"I presume I will remain an old "batch" the rest of my days. Our family are all well. Lizzie and Hattie are living in the city of Sacramento; Hattie has four children, two boys and two girls; Lizzie has no children. Clara is living in Georgetown, twelve miles from here; she has three children and a nice home. William is living in Sacramento and is married and has one child.

"Father and Mother are growing old very fast. Mother has failed more since this last fire than she has in ten years previously, though her hair is still black. Father's hair and beard are as white as snow.

"Last night I heard the cannon in Sacramento booming forth the joyful news of the election in New Hampshire; Three Cheers for her!

"Give our love to all the family. You must write soon, you do not know how much your letters are prized here or you would write more often. When you write direct the letters to Greenwood Valley, El Dorado County, California. All from your cousin,

John F. Farnsworth"

Epilogue-

Hulda Shaw died two months after the above letter was written. Seba Farnsworth removed to Sacramento in 1870, and spent the remaining years of his life enjoying comforts that had been denied him during his early residence in the state. The three Farnsworth daughters, and the "good and worthy men" they married (Hiram Van Namee, William F. Knox and Daniel Jarrett) and their brother, William C. Farnsworth, have many descendants living in California today. If any of them should chance to see this story of their forbears, this contributor would like to receive a letter from them.

(Contributed by Mrs. Vernon L. LeMaster, Garden Grove, California)

"Let the record be made of the men and things of today,
lest they pass out of memory tomorrow and are lost.
Then perpetuate them not upon wood or stone that crumble
to dust but upon paper chronicled in picture and in
words that endure forever.

-- Kirkland.