Galena Gazette and Advertiser Tuesday, April 2, 1850

Correspondence of the Missouri Republican
Sutters Fort, Upper California
Interesting letter from California - Jan. 24, 1850

Messrs. Chambers & knapp: I sit down to give you a little matter which may be (pro bono publico). I propose to give a short sketch of four subjects: 1st, of the health of the country; 2nd, of the condition of Sacramento City; 3rd, of the sickness of the mines; 4th, of teams and outfits.

1st. Of the health, I have to say that it is bad enough- I mean that there is enough of sickness and deaths. I have conversed with several intellegent men, and their opinion is, that one-third of all who have crossed the mountains have lost their health, for months at least - how many have died since their arrival, I can form no correct estimation, for want of data. The number of deaths in the town of Sacramento and this fort alone, have probably averaged 18 or 20 per day, for the last five months. How many have died in the mines, I can give no account; but the sickness at the mines since the first of November has been less in proportion than at Sacramento and vicinity. The diseases most common are the scurvy, complexed with rhumatism, dysentery, and typhus fever. I am not speaking of the country three hundred miles south of this - for there, I suppose, it is more healthy at this season of the year. San Francisco is more healthy than Sacramento City. The cause of so much sickness is referable to the multitude of emigrants who have been living in tents, and sleeping on the ground - and the rainy season has been long and severe; is not over yet, and it set in on the first of November. Another cause of the sickness is the hardships, exposure, anxiety and irritation which the emigrant has to undergo, in crossing the plains. The word PLAINS needs to be defined - else it will fool as many more as it has already done. It is a delusion, because when you have got to Fort Laramie you are across the plains, but have not hardly commenced the work of your great journey. The way so far is easy, and mostly a prairie, clothed in verdure and flowers.

After the emigrant has got here, he may begin to look out for the ELEPHANT, but will not be able to see him all at one sight - he can see nothing more than his tail at first; and soon he will not see his head and ears - not until within 150 miles of this place. But I have digressed, and must go back to my subject. Another cause of disease is that the people all use too much animal food on account of the paucity of vegetables in the country, and the consequent high prices - for instance, potatoes are worth $25 per 100 lbs., and have been worth since I came here $50 per 100 lbs.; apple and peach fruit is worth from 75 cents to $1 per lb.; onions $1 per lb.; pickles $4 to $5 a gallon. Pickled pork, beans and rice, are the cheapest articles of diet here, yet less of them are used than anything else, because they are not fashionable.

2nd. Of the condition of the city at this time. The city for the last month has been totally under water. Some parts have been ten feet under water, others from three to five, etc. The waters are now falling, and hopes are entertained of its soon being off. The waste and destruction of property is incalculable. Thousands of dollars worth of goods were lying beside the streets in front of the warehouses, which were entirely carried away; and even goods were ruined in the houses, although raised, in many instances, several feet above the floors. All the adobe houses are tumbled down. Many were obliged to leave their houses in the midst of night, their property all left therein, and all such have been robbed of their contents. I am a loser in this way to the amount of $100, as I was taken violently with inflammation of the lungs just as the waters were ready to enter my tent house. However, I feel that I made a narrow and lucky escape with my life, having got out to the Masonic and Odd Fellows' Hospital just in time to save my heels. The water was unusually high, and came upon earlier in the season tan is common. The sufferings of the people, especially of females, can be better imagined than described. In order to account for all this, it is necessary to have a distinct idea of the location of the city and the adjacent country. Well then, the city is built one and a half miles below the mouth of the American Fork of the Sacramento River; within forty miles above this, there are the Bear, the Yuba, and the united forks of Feather

river, all large streams, which empty into the main trunk of the Sacramento river. The rains have been heavy, you may now appreciate the modus operandi of things. The city was located where it is, although on very low ground, because it is near the proximity to the mines and the head of navigation at a low stage of water. The city will probably be diked all around this season - the only way that it can be saved from future floods. Strange as it may seem to you, I must state one more fact here, i. e. the gold has actually been washed down by the waters from the American fork so plentifully, that it is picked up and washed out in the streets of the town.

3rd. In regard to the extent and richness of the mines, there is but one opinion here, that is, they are inexhaustible. Gold has been dug at various points, from King's River, far south of this, to Trinity River north. The question will be asked by many, what is the average amount daily made by the miners? - Well, this is a hard question to answer, because there is much difference in the richness of the mineral at different points. Again, there are many inconsiderate youths who go, perhaps, as well as older persons; but, from some motive, peculiar to themselves, will not give the exact truth of the matter.- Still more, we have nothing like exact data to make estimates upon, from any source. But tis much is quite certain, that there are but few, very few, who will work at a placer where they cannot make more than half an ounce a day, especially in the real mining season. In the winter, where they are quartered permanently, the case may be different in many instances. Every miner who has had some experience, expects to make at least an ounce a day, or else he is not satisfied with his placer, and will prospect for a better one. Often, we hear of their making, on an average of seven days, from $50 to $100 and $200 per day; in fact, there is no doubt that such is the case. Many have certainly, through this last year, made from $5,000 to $10,000; some of them have gone home. It must not be understood that all make their money by digging it. Most of those who have done so well, are those who brought capital with them and went directly to trade in the mines or in the cities of San Francisco, Sacramento, and other places. This gives them a very great advantage, as everything is sold at enormous profits, espec-

ially for the three months while the emigrants were coming into the country. Some, by a TAP at the monte bank have made enough to go home, and some to boot; some, by a rare streak of good luck, have made $5000 or $8000 by digging and working. Since the first of November, the probability is, there has not been more than enough made to pay the expense of living. Provisions are, of course, much higher in the mines than at Sacramento; especially so, when the communication is cut off by the rains. Such has been the case this winter. Flour and pork has been worth from $1 to $1.50 a pound, and other things in proportion. On the average, those who arrive here with no capital, but have been so fortunate as to enjoy good health, have probably made from $300 to $500. Those who have been sick even a part of the time, have made nothing. Those who have been sick all the time, and they are NOT A FEW, of course, are in debt to their friends or to strangers. Still, after all the disadvantages of the country, there is not another perhaps on the face of the earth where a man can make money as fast as he can here, if he can keep his health. A man can make his $10 a day at almost any kind of work. A good cook in a public house gets from $200 to $300 a month; a boy, of 18 years of age, in the Masonic and Odd Fellow's Hospital, gets $150 per month.

4th. I do not advise any man to come, rich or poor, but to those who will come, I can give them a little good advice, especially if they come by land.- Ox teams are allowed by all, or nearly so, to be much the surest teams. But the load and the wagon must be properly adjusted to the team. In the first place, no wagon should be taken on the road heavier than a light two horse wagon. It should be entirely new, or as good as new, and made of the very best timber, especially the running gears. The spindles must not be too large, so as to turn stiffly on the axle; but when raised and well greased with black lead and tallow, you should be able to turn the wheels as you do the rim of a spinning wheel. The bed and tongue and other parts, should be light in proportion. To each team there should not be less than 4 yoke of oxen - 5 are none too many; then if you lose one or two yoke you can go on by lighting up a little, and safely get through. To each team there should be four hands, and not less than three - four are none too many to do the work, especially if one be sick. To each team 1600 pounds are all that

should be put on - your load should be weighed, every pound of it. The oxen should not be less than five years old nor over seven, in no case will four year old stears hold out, especially if not inured and well broke to work before you start. Your yokes should all, except the wheel cattle, be of the lightest material - lynn timber is the best - that for the wheel oxen may be made of maple and heavier thn any other. The bows must not be too tight, if they are, your steers will be found to swell up as tight as a drum head. To each man 150 lbs. of bacon and 125 lbs. of flour is an abundance. One-half of his bacon had better be in hams, for the sake of his health; it is much better to eat on the road. The emigrant ought to get as little greasy meat as possible in order to keep off the scurvy. Risen bread is much better than lard and saleratus biscuit. Yeast taken can be kept all the way out. The bread to be baked in the morning should be made up the night before, with yeast in it; if it sours too much it can be corrected with a little saleratus. A plenty of pickles, ¼ bushel onions, and ¼ bushel beans to each man, is none too much. Vinegar should be used every day.

Apple and peach fruit and rice are as useful articles of diet as can possibly be taken on the road. To each man 80 lbs. rice and three-quarters of a bushel of apple or peach fruit, at least are necessary, - being easily cooked, they are always convenient. Now, if the emigrant will use as little side bacon, and also very little hot lard and saleratus biscuit, and more of other articles, such as above-mentioned, I will warrant him to come through UNSCATHED with scurvy. - Bacon hams are much less objectionable than greasy sides. Very great errors were committed by the last emigration, in this respect. Still, every mess ought to have some side meat, to use for cooking fresh meat, and lard for bread. The way to cook beans on the road (the ship bean is the best) is to stew them; but they must be boiled in fresh water until they are soft before any salt or bacon be put into them - otherwise they will not cook well; they ought to be very thoroughly cooked, and well seasoned with cayenne pepper - if so, they are the most wholesome food that can be used on the road. I have been very cautious about articles of diet, because scurvey has been the POISON BANE of the last emigration.

Recollect, therefore, that all the articles I have mentioned are ANTI-SCORBUTICS, except hot lard, bread and greasy bacon. Now about traveling. In order for a gentleman to travel with any quiet of mind, or satisfaction, certain considerations are necessary. The most of these are, that he has no joint stock mess to deal with - if he has, I can pity him, from sad experience. There should be but one owner of the team, wagon and load, to each mess, because there must be one head person to direct the movements, who will feel his responsibility. Joint stock messes will not agree, and all such were broken up last year - their outfits, in most cases, wholly lost. A man, having his team, may take his men through by contract. As to the amount of money it is worth per man, I would say that $350 is none too much, and he to do his equal share of duty on the road. This money, if not paid in advance, ought to be well secured to be paid in California. Many have lost in this way, by their men so soon feeling their independence after they are here. "White man mighty unsartain," on the road, and too often in California. It has been remarked by every observing man, that the disposition changes strangely on the road. If emigrants intend to make their transit across the mountains certain, they should cross the Missouri river, every one, by the 12th day of May. If the grass is not sufficiently up, he must haul some corn along for his team. Every mess should have a guide book; and the best are the Mormon books. The emigrants ought never to hurry their teams - the oxen should be allowed to take their own gait. The travel should be slow for the first 600 miles, for your teams are not inured to travel, and, besides. they ought not to lose a pound of flesh, but should gain, for thus far there is good grass. After leaving Fort Laramie, it will often be necessary to make forced drives, or rather long drives, to reach grass and water. Bear in mind, you must not hurry your teams, because you have a long march; but be diligent, lose no time, and you are safe.

Until the emigrant has got near Big Sandy, he has no choice of roads. About ten miles from this river the road forks- the left goes by Fort Bridger, thence to Salt Lake - the right hand goes on to the Sublette cut-off. If the emigrant wishes

to recruit his team or change off some crippled stock, if he is wily, he may safely go by the Mormon city, and there recruit a week. There he can get fresh vegetables of every kind. If he takes the Sublette cut-off, he should lay by one day at Big Sandy, to rest his team. He should leave this river at 3 to 4 o'clock, P. M., and drive steadily all night; he should not stop more than twice - half an hour each time. His team will travel briskly by night, and he must make the most of his time, because the next day he will have to travel very slow, for the stears will begin to lag early in the day, and you cannot reach Green River before 4 or 5 o'clock, P. M.; (I did not till 7 o'clock.)

The distance across the great Sublette Cut-off is much more than the books tell you. Ware says 35 miles, but it has been measured by Road-ometers and found to be 53 miles to the first ferry, and 56 to the lower one. After leaving Green river the country is mountainous to Bear river. Here, in this valley, I found the best grass for stock I ever saw, and in greater abundance. The course along here is well watered. When the emigrant has got to where he will leave Bear river, and two or three miles this side, he comes to the Myer's Cut-off, made this last year. This road is 50 miles nearer than to go by Fort Hall, and much the best road for grass and water - (I came this road.)

I must soon finish my writing. Nothing more needs to be said, as nothing of great importance will occur, until the emigrant has got low down on Humboldt river. When he has got to within about 70 miles of the sink of this river, he will come to the Northern or Lawson route - (do not take this, for it is 300 miles farther than any other road.) Keep the old road to the sink, and about four or five miles this side. Here take the left, which is the Carson route, and much better than the old Truckey route, from all accounts that I have of it. I am persuaded that it is much the best. I came the Truckey route, crossing it 27 times in as many miles, and very bad crossings.

Having got the emigrant this far, I deem him safe, in any season, giving him reasonable time.

Yours, &c.&c. M.M.

WEEKLY NORTH-WESTERN GAZETTE
GALENA, ILLINOIS, TUESDAY, MAY 7, 1850

From the Jeffersonian
Letter from California
Stockton, San Joaquin River
January 27, 1850

January 27, 1850

Dear Parents,

* * * I arrived at this place on the 30th of Dec. last, after a long and very wearisome journey of nine months, Oh, how little did I think what a terrible trip I had before me, when I left home, but I suppose you would like to hear some of the particulars of my journey.

* * * I wrote last from Fort Laramie. We proceeded 300 miles further, before the animals began to show that they felt the journey. So we (I speak of emigrants generally) had to commence to lighten the loads. We put our clothes in sacks, and threw away our trunks and one bbl. of pork. My wardrobe was split up for fire wood, in fact, we put out everything that we thought we could spare, but we have since found that, if necessity says so, people can do with very little.

We then proceeded very well til we came to the Desert. There our real trouble commenced. We were persuaded, as the season was far advanced, to take a new road which was represented to be much shorter and better. We afterwards found the distance to be about 500 miles farther, and such roads as none but a Californian has ever seen.

I really think there were hours when the wheels scarcely touched the ground on account of rocks.

You have heard of the American Desert - Where we crossed it, it was 70 miles wide, with no kind of vegetation, except a few wild sage plants which were so very bitter that no animal will eat them. The most of the wagons were so heavily laden, that they could not take a sufficient quantity of hay. We had to take all we could in the wagons, and travel through a very barren country for 100 miles before we really struck the Desert, so that our animals were quite weak to commence with. We travelled day and night - started on the Desert early on Thursday morning - about four o'clock in the afternoon we came to a well; took in what water we could; took some food, in great haste, watered the oxen, and pushed on. On Friday at noon, the cattle began to fail and soon after, to drop down and die; for we got no water again till Saturday night, except from a sulphur spring, and very little of that. I had been quite sick the week before and the Doctor said I must keep as quiet as possible, and remain in the wagon; but the oxen were so tired that I had to take to my feet, and walked from 4 o'clock until 1 in the morning, when the women were so worn out, that the train had to stop till daybreak. At the first streak of dawn, we moved on, but before

sunrise, we found it was no use; the oxen could go no further with the wagons till they had food and water. We fed them hard bread and flour, to enable them to reach grass and water, which was 7 miles from where the wagons were left. Part of the men went with the oxen, and the rest took buckets, the women remaining to guard the wagons. The men with the buckets returned about sundown; they could get no water but from salt boiling springs. The weather was quite warm, so the water was still hot when it came, but it was, without exception, the best drink I ever had! We had not had a drop of water for two days. It would have made your heart ache to hear the children cry for food and drink, and, yet we did not dare to give them our hard bread, or salt pork; for that only made the matter worse. On the third day, the men with the cattle returned. By traveling by night, and resting by day, the oxen could soon perform their usual tasks. So you see we weathered that storm with much less loss than we expected. Many of the emigrants lost their entire teams, and were forced to pack through; but our time had not yet come. Many teams were destroyed on the Humboldt river by the Indians shooting the oxen. The last night of August, our train encamped and sent out the oxen with a guard of four men. My husband was one of them. After dark as we were sitting around the campfire, we were startled by cries of "Help","Indians","murder","I am shot","the cattle are gone", etc. Every man sprang for his gun. Albert was unarmed. I sent him his rifle, and in less than 5 minutes, there was not a man in camp. You may imagine what a night we women spent. We had no fears of Indians, for they are too cowardly to attack a camp - The wounded man was brought in, and they recovered the cattle, before daylight. I suppose there was scarcely another train so fortunate. But it was so soon discovered, that the Indians, to save themselves, left the cattle - so we escaped again. Then came the pass in the Sierra Nevada mountains. It was about 5 miles over - They divided the loads as equally as they could in the wagons, and put 12 yoke to each. It took a long time to get over, as the ascent was so steep we had to let the oxen rest every two or three yards. We succeeded in getting over very well. As it grew late in the season, the feed run short and the cattle again began to fade. We found that we had another desert to cross, but there was plenty of water, which we had learned to appreciate, I assure you. Our wagon had become the worse of the wear, and Albert had an opportunity to get a better one, by adding another yoke to our oxen and 3 more men to our company. So you see I had enough to see to my welfare. When we were about 200 miles from the settlement, it was tho't best for Albert to go ahead to procure mules to help us over the desert. He started on the 16th of October on foot. We were to proceed as fast as possible, and he would meet us. We proceeded very well till the last day of Oct., when it commenced raining for the first time in 7 months. When the rains begin, they fall continually for the next 4 or 5 months, so that our prospects were now poor indeed. The 1st of Nov. we were to start on the desert. We had plenty of hay and water, and we expected to get alomg well, but alas when daylight came, we found 8 ins. of snow on the ground. All we could do was to push ahead, but we could make no progress, as the roads were so full of snow that the oxen would cut their feet on it. When they went through they would sink to their shoulders in the mire. It took all day to go 4 or 5 miles. It was snow under foot, and sleet overhead. Dear

little Emily kept in the wagon and I walked beside it, expecting every moment to see it overset.

I think for one week there was not a dry thread on me, and everything in the wagon was perfectly saturated, and I could not change my clothes if I would. Everything was going from bad to worse, and we could only struggle on. It was our only way. And no Albert came! I was nearly frightened to death for fear the Indians had killed him. I found out afterwards that it was full as bad with him as myself. He could not get back or forward. I tried to keep up my courage, for it would do me no good to fret and would only worry the men, who were kind and did every thing they could for me -

On the 3rd of Nov. we encamped at dark. It was very cold, and I got my supper and went to bed. I could have wrung the bed clothes. Emily began to cry with cold - that almost broke my heart, and I cried too. The dear child wound her arms round my neck, and said "Don't cry Ma, and I wont cry either." - I raised up three times that night to wring the water from my hair. The day at last dawned, and I rose and went to work. I found one yoke of oxen chilled to death. After breakfast, Mr. Forester said to me, "Three of us have concluded to pack - we leave you our oxen - get through if you can." I was thankful for their kindness. We then went to unloading the wagons. Messrs. Forester, West and Pratt put all they could in sacks to carry on their backs, and throwed the rest away. I left all I could possibly dispense with as I thought, but I was mistaken - two large sacks of clothes, all the bed clothes I could spare, my tent, bed, bolsters, stove, all iron ware, and a sack of coffee. I now started with a light heart, thinking surely I can get through, but before an hour passed, another yoke of oxen died, and I was left in the mountains, in the midst of snow, sixty miles from a house, with only two yoke of weak oxen. The next day, a gentleman from St. Louis, a Mr. Warren, offered to put my oxen with his, and take my provisions and family in his wagon, and leave mine. I thankfully accepted. The morrow came, but everything was worse. We were out of the snow, but it rained in perfect torrants. The mud was nearly knee deep. We could get no fire; our provisions had grown low, the cattle were nearly exhausted, and everything looked dark enough. By trying very hard, I made out to boil some coffee. We sat down to eat our hard bread; but my heart was too full. I raised a mouthful to my lips, and burst into tears.

Mr. Warren sprang to his feet and said, "Mrs. Brush what do you say to leaving the wagons and going to the settlements?" I said I would be very glad to, but what shall I do with Emily. He replied, "I'll take care of her." I asked Mrs. Barber if she would go with me, she said yes, and we were off. Mr. Warren strapped Emily in a blanket upon his back, and she was ready for her journey. Mr. O"Neill of Mt. Carroll carried two blankets for Mrs. Barber and me to sleep on. We climbed the hills, waded rivers, tramped through mud, and slept without shelter for three days and nights, and at last saw in a beautiful grove a little mud cabin. We were in the valley of the Sacramento. In about

four days the men came in from the wagons compelled to abandon all except a few things which were packed upon the oxen that were left. I had but one ox left, he brought me a few clothes and died the next day from fatigue.

Dear friends is it not hard to get to California? Do not let anyone come if you can hinder it, particularly overland. No one who has not witnessed it could conceive the amouunt of destruction of property. It is estimated that not one tenth of the animals that leave the States live to get through. If it had not been for assistance from government hundreds would have died in the mountains. To those who were sick and unable to get through, the Government took provisions and made them comfortable for the winter. You recollect Mr. Roberts and family who left Galena. They are in the mountains unable to get in this winter, young Mrs. Roberts was too unwell to walk and the rest would not leave her. (At Fort Laramie, Harvey,Moss lost his wife, Mrs. Winlac takes charge of the children, they passed us on the desert.) There were plenty of little children put in sacks and thrown across the backs of mules, for the sake of getting here - all you could see was their little heads peeping over the mule's backs. But to return to my own affairs, I remained at the ranche a week when Albert came. He had met with great difficulty on account of the high water and bad roads. He brought three mules but it was too late, everything was lost. Our men joined with another company and built a flat boat, on which we descended the river about three hundred miles to Sacramento City, there we waited several days for a boat to take us to Stockton. While at the city we boarded at Mr. Winters of Elizabeth, paid $10 a day board. They have a large tavern, that is, it is about the size of your dwelling and that's very large for this place. Six hundred and fifty dollars a month to eat. We are now you see in Stockton, and are living in a house. Very few can say that in this city of tents. Our home was brought ready made from China and is a real Chinese cottage; it consists of two rooms, one of which I occupy and the other a family from Tennessee; there is no windows but the doors are half glass. We pay sixty dollars a month rent for our room. George Brush boards with us. There are but five American families in the place, mine included. Last April there were no inhabitants here, the population now numbers 2000 residents and a great many transient people.

There is any amount of gold here. I saw a lump today which weighed 23 pounds solid gold; it came from the Maccalinia diggings.

Mrs. Miller of the Broadway House is dead. James DuPui went out with three of his company and never returned, they were probably killed * * *

Your affectionate daughter

Mary E. Brush