

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 5, 1961

Letter To Ohio

William Partridge was on his way to the California Gold Fields when he wrote an exciting letter to his sister in Dayton, Ohio, telling her of his many hair-raising experiences through the vast country between Independence, Mo., and the far west country. Through the kindness of Mrs. Frank Ringland of Carmel, a "step-descendant" of the letter writer, we are delighted to publish this bit of early western history in today's Diary.

Ella Seaman, daughter of Catherine and Samuel Seaman, was born in Calaveras County on July 24, 1868. After her father's death her mother, the grandmother of Mrs. Ringland, married William Partridge, the author of the letter to his young sister. They had one son, Newton. William died in early 1884 or late 1883. Ringland's grandmother, whom she knew only as Kate Partridge, lived with her son Newton in Berkeley until Newton's death in 1914. After that and until her death she lived with her other daughter, Mrs. Charles Henry Ward at 2335 Hyde Street in San Francisco.

That home was later purchased by the Sutros who remodeled it into apartments. It stands next to the house which was once owned by Robert Louis Stevenson and was saved during the 1906 fire by the Bohemian Club members who covered the roof with wine-soaked blankets to keep off flying cinders.

The letter of the Gold Rush Days follows.

Dear Sister:

Knowing that you are an admirer of thrilling narratives I have reserved for you a description of my journey from Ft. Larmie to Mary River "Illihe" where your "ow" midlights. Although you were beginning to be considerable of a linguist when I left my "dulcet donny", yet I do not think you are acquainted with the Chinook dialect: the word "Illihe" means land, "ow" brother, and midlights, means resides. I speak the Chinook "wanna" fluently, but I will not occupy any more space in my letter with it.

In my last letter, the thread of my narrative was abruptly severed as our wagon and one other was leaving the rest of our train, for we did not think it expedient to delay our traveling any longer. We crossed the Black Hills without accident, the sick man in the wagon that accompanied us was apparently growing

better. We have arrived where the trail takes a final leave of the Platte River. We crossed a country almost destitute of grass for 40 miles and arrived at Sweet Water, a beautiful river. Here also is the celebrated Independence Rock, which is 500 feet long, 120 high and from 200 to 300 feet wide. It is solid granite, smooth and rounding on top having been washed by the rains of centuries.

It was the wish of the company that your brother should deliver a Fourth of July oration, but it was otherwise decreed. The sick man, above mentioned, died on that day, and my skill was displayed not on rhetoric but as a carver on wood. I cut his epitaph on the headboard. Again, we heard the mournful wail of a widowed woman. Her husband was dead, she was left alone among strangers, in a distant country too far from her friends. We tried to console her, and though not professors of religion, we knelt on the grave and prayed that "he who stills the ravens clamorous cry and decks the lily fair" would receive her husband in heaven and protect her on her journey.

Six miles from Independence Rock is the Devil's Gate where the Sweet Water has forced its way through the solid rock of the mountain. The channel is two or three roads wide and 500 feet high. Such sights as this will repay the weary traveler for his toil. Half a day's journey from this place a quarrel arose in our mess, the result of which was a separation took place, the wagon was sawed in twain. Chitwood and Scovill, taking one part and Pilkington and myself the other. As we got the fastest traveling oxen, we soon left them behind. The road now was very bad, and one day when we crossed Sweet Water three times in one day's journey, our cart was near being upset in the middle of the river, Our oxen also took a stampede (fright) and it was with difficulty we recovered them.

One day we had encamped by the side of Sweet Water and had taken from the provision bag "mucamuc laciker" (eatables for us) and our cattle were quietly grazing around us, we noticed a "horseman galloping furiously to the eastward. He stopped at a train encamped about a quarter of a mile above us on the river. His coming appeared to create a panic among them, they ran and drove up their cattle and commenced yoking instantly. We saw at once something was wrong. He came to us and said "Join us in the fight, 400 Indians, in yonder canyon in battle array, block the road." We yoked up, loaded our shot

guns with buck shot and our revolvers and fell in with the train I spoke of. (We travel alone now).

Now I shall adopt the plan of a novelist and stop at this interesting place just to satisfy a passion for teasing, which experience has taught you I possess. Give my love to my mother and father and kiss the children, I long once more to be at home. I suppose you dine today on a turkey. I have not eaten bread for two weeks. Flour is \$20 per hundred and then it is hard to get. The snow is two feet deep in the valley.

I remain your dear brother,
W. Partridge.