THE FIRST OVERLAND MAIL BAG TO CALIFORNIA.

Bancroft Library

The 8th of March, 1848, my father with four sons started from Mississippi overland for Oregon. He had been teaching school for twenty-five years, and being somewhat broken in health, thought that he would take a vacation of a few years, and after having corresponded with some of the prominent pioneers of Oregon, concluded that the trip to that territory would give him the required rest and be a good practical outdoor schooling for his boys. Arriving at Independence, Mo., about the 1st of April (which was then the outfitting point for Oregon and California), he remained until the 8th of May, procuring his outfit. While so doing he had become acquainted with the Postmaster at that place. He (the Postmaster) told him that there had accumulated in the office about 300 letters for Oregon and there was no regular postal route to that country, and wanted to know if he would take them, if permission could be procured from the postal authorities. As there would be but little weight, he consented to the proposition, on condition that he should be authorized to collect the regular postage (which was 40 d at that time, and very few of any were prepard, as the postal laws at that time did not require prepayment, also any additional amount that the parties were willing to pay). The Postmaster got permission of the authorities at Washington to deliver them to him, as there was no other way to get them to their destination. They were placed in a canvas mail bag, such as we use now for papers, tied with a strong string and delivered to him. Our outfit having been procured,

(consisting of two wagons and ox teams), we started on the 4th day of May for Oregon. I do not know, but think that was the first and last regular mail that was ever dispatched in the United States by ox teams. It most certainly was, for such a long distance. Our train consisted of 36 wagons, 23 or 24 families, and my recollection is about sixty of the company were capable of bearing arms. All of the trains for Oregon had started before we were ready, and as there were only about 8 families who wished to go to that Territory, we joined a company for California, Jo Childs, of Napa Valley, Cal., being their captain, or leader. He had made two former trips to California and was well acquainted with the road, camping places, etc. It was necessary at that time to have a leader who was somewhat acquainted with the country and Indian character. All were expected to defer to his advice and direction. We had no serious trouble with the Indians. There were but few very savage tribes then, and let me say right here that if crossed they would steal from us and occasionally kill some of our cattle at night, even when under guard, as they used only bow and arrow at that time, so could shoot them at night without noise. The Siouxs were friendly, but levied tribute by requiring us to pay it in the way of beads, provisions, etc. As our Captain knew when we were in the vicinity of savage Indians, he always required double guards at night, and as every man and boy was well armed and always ready at a moment's notice, we were never molested, but were several times very nervous, as Indians would build their signal fires in the mountains and we would occasionally see them over the brow of a hill. At one time we saw a [cloud?] dust approaching, and presently men on horseback

riding speedily. All got their arms in readiness, but soon with his field glass the Captain made out that they were friends. As they approached, Childs recognized Colonel Fremont and Kit Carson, with whom he was acquainted. My recollection is that the Company numbered about sixty. They camped with us one night and then sped on, as theirs was a pack train and could make better time. I could give many incidents, but am digressing. Arriving at Fort Hall, we heard that the Snake Indians were on the warpath and had attacked emigrant trains and settlers, and as we were but a handful that wanted to go to Oregon, concluded to keep on to California with the main train, and it is well that we did so, or assuredly we would have been murdered. While traveling down the Humboldt (or Mary's River as it was then called), we met and camped with a party of mormons on their way from California to Salt Lake. There we received our first news of the discovery of gold in California and its fabulous wealth. Of course we thought that it was greatly exaggerated, but when we arrived at the mines we found that "the half had not been told". However, we did not accelerate our speed. Our teams were becoming faded and undue haste would probably leave us to make the last part of our journey by foot. We arrived at the foot of the Sierras about the middle of September, and as the weather looked somewhat threatening and the fate of the Donnor party being fresh in our memory, we began to get quite nervous and uneasy; 6 or 8 inches of snow meant delay and probably death by cold and starvation, as our provisions were getting low. However, we arrived at Ringold, two miles from Placerville, on the 4th of October, just four days short of six months from the time we left the Missouri River. In 1848,

mail 5 months by ox team from the Missouri River; 1893, the same by rail in less than 4 days. Now, for the distribution of the mail. We found, as it seemed, about one-half of the able-bodied men from Oregon in the mines. We let it be known, by word of mouth (for there were no newspapers at that time in the mining section) that we had the Oregon mail in our tent. It was but a few days until they began to call for their mail. But few were disappointed in getting a letter or letters for themselves or friends. We let the first ones set the price that they were willing to pay. They set it at \$2 per letter. I remember that one man got 8 letters and paid \$10. There was not a man that ever made any complaint about the price. In fact, for several years messengers made regular trips to Sacramento and brought letters to the mines at \$2 apiece. In 1851 men made a business of getting in line at the Postoffice and take the chance of selling their place to some one when they got near the winprepared () that dow. If they did not sell, they had a list from was worth more than money to some. This mail from the East only arrived twice a month, and it was only for a few days that there was such a rush. I have known men to pay \$16 for a place near the window. It may be asked why the messengers continued in the business so long after there were mail routes to the mines -- simply because it had become a business, and many letters were addressed to Sacramento instead of the mining camps and men had rather pay the \$2 to have them brought to their camp than to write and have them sent to the nearest office. What letters were not called for, we kept for over a year, until there was no further inquiry. I then constituted myself a dead-letter office. As there was nothing more valuable

first bushows the Beg by rail in less than 4 days. Now, for the distribution of the mail.

or interesting than samples of the last . . . of some of the family, I consigned them to the flames .

Thos. S. Bayley. Bancroft Library

PAPERS OF THOMAS S. BAYLEY:

RECOLLECTIONS OF CALIFORNIA DURING THE GOLD RUSH.

(Presented to the Bancroft Library by Mrs. Williamita

B. Callow, 1528 McGee Ave., Berkeley. These are
recollections of her paternal grandfather)

(Transcripts gift of Mrs. Guy L. Bayley, June 6, 1949)

O_D 5011 7 follers

Ale Gisit overland mail But to Cal forming The straight much 1848 my father Bancroft Library with four sons studed from missist oruland for Oldefon. He had been heading I should for 25 yes, and king somewhat headen in health thought It it he would take a vaculin of a few yours And after themeny Conestanded with feet to and after from ment & inverse of Gregor. Condonder that the life to their Justing would give him to required ust and he in good for Incle outdoor school har his boys aring at Independence mother with the the suffitting from While so done I know he can acquains with the 8 hr at that place Ite the 8 hr told him the election or mutal o on the deffice that 300 tellers for Oregon and there was no expelor

Fortal work to that country, and wanted. how if he would take the Bancroft Library if prairie and he promed from the Sastal authorities, As there would be but little weight he townsuled to the proposition, on em dition that he should be authorized to collect the regular forlage which was 4005 at that lime and my few of any were perfored, (as the regime help my ment I that time did and begins help my ment I the 8 m get berming and additioned from the delines of the authorities at the graphing for to delines way to get them to their distinction They were placed on a lowers made bag such as we used for pupus Show, tied with a strong taling, and delined to him, Our withit having been browned Consisting of 2 hours and on trams.) He strited on the A day of may for largon, I do not how but think that that was to first and lost regular mare the

was every disputched in the by by lost terms. It must extend was, for Andra a long distance, l'un train Consisted of 36 wagons. 23 or 4 families and my recordiction is about 60 of the All up the hims for leepon had standed before me men ready, and as there mue only about 8 families who wished to go to that In me joined a lompany for ent to Childs of Chapa Chaling Cal bung their cultime or leader, the had made how for me builts to Cul and was well acquainter with the was , gamping blaces + a, It was nears my cit that lines to have a header that was somewhat acquamted with the comby and Indian Chadwall And all were expected to differ to his advice, and direction, "He had and serious trouble mith the Ind

The were but her may now here that it all the that it are many right here that it are Bancroft Library us and accus imally kill some up our cuttle at night even when much grand as they well only know + arrow at that hime they ended should them at might without noise, the Dionon much himally, but havined hitherthe by regulary ins to fruit, Tilled in the way of head provisions he As our laftain trier when me much the be maky of Savage Indians. He always regimed double grand at night. And as energy man and bry was well arrect and always ready at a moment while he mue over mulisted, But were reveal times very nervous, as therems would hould their signal fires in the montains and me would accersionally see their ance the how of a hill, Al one have me suy a graget dust approaching, and presently merc 'on horsebada liding spedily, All god Min om reading, but soon

with this opens the Captain made and that they were fireds to they approached Philos recognized but humont and kit Comm with whom he was acquaintee, my secretical in that the as anumbered about 60. The Camped with us one night, and then sped on, as this was a puch time and could make better time I could Airing at yal Hall. He heard that the Snake Indians were on the war path, and had attacked emigrant has and sellers, and as we were but a hundred that wanted to go to are you londided to keep on to Ohl with man hain, and it is well that pue did so as assuredly me would Neure heen and dued. While hady down the Annihall of as manys River as it was Then solled me met and campel with a buly of morning, on their way fine

Cal to Dult Seake, There we word the on first ours of the discourse of gold in Cal and its fahrelms matter (ef come we thought that it was qually escapiality But when me arinel at the mines we from I that the half had and hear told Howines we did not account on speed, em teams were hearing jaded and induce hoste would probably him is to make the hant part of our princing foot The arised at the foot of the sieras about the middle of Siptember and as the meather looked somewhat Unestering, and the fale of the Ornmer hady him typhon me and memory to held to held and held to held the held to held the second metally and the held the held the held the second metally he are as one them to the second metally he Angold two miles from Black the on the 4th of le other, just 4 lays short of Dise mouth from the hime me left by an team 1893 the same by raid in to them 4 days, I now for the distribution of

Min mail, He found, as I seemed about one half at the able by died so the be know , by word of month for there were are onersporter at their time in the mining section) that we had the Ceregon and in our tent, It was but a few days mitch they began to call for the mail but four mer dis afforment in getting a letter on felters for thurselves or priends, "He let !! P! withing to day they aid it it still realisate that they willing to day they and a man that enter realisate made any complaint colobat the frice. In bad for several years, any surgers and eighter history to overaments and him put littles to the mines at 200 aprice In 1857 min made a business of gutting in him at the P.le and take the chance of relling gut near the windows anough them many to struck the most

from the teast only arrived himse a month and it was only for a few days that there was such a rush . I have known men to pay 1800 for a flace near the window It may be asked why the messengers Continued in the business so long after the have grail works too the arms simply because it had become a tusines, and many letter were additioned to see noted by the I the good to have them tought to thin camp than to mite and have the sent to the newst 45 office, What littles mue and called 180 for me 1kelt for own of year mobil 2180 three was no porter oughing. I then constituted in judy a dead little after. As there was crothing more valuable on intrusting them December of the last ches of some of the family I consigned them to the blowing