



MARCH 1981

LOS ANGELES CORRAL

NUMBER 142

The Letters of William K. McKee From Alaska During the Gold Rush of '98

Edited by Maurice Hattem

Introduction

The author of these letters, William K. McKee, was for 45 years a resident of Alameda, California, and later in Oakland where he spent the final years of his life.

William McKee was born in San Francisco in 1858. He became a civil engineer and was an early-day Democratic Party leader. He was a cousin of Samuel Bell McKee who was a California Supreme Court Justice from 1879 to 1886. William's father, John B. McKee was a pioneer San Francisco merchant.

He was married to Sarah Ann Ball who was born on the island of Ceylon where her parents were prominent in the early English colonization of the island.

McKee died on October 14, 1930. His wife passed away on December 7, 1932. They had two sons: William A. and Robert E. McKee both of whom have since died. They are the "Willie" and "Bobby" referred to in the letters from McKee to his wife.

These letters were written when McKee was 40 years old. He was married 16 years when he left for Alaska, leaving his wife and two young children in Alameda, California.

Although the first letter deals mainly with sundry details and descriptions of daily events, it really is more of a diary which includes the periods 25 September 1898 to 19 May 1899.

The second letter, written on 8 January 1899 was in fact mailed before the much longer one of 25 September 1898. Though the letter of 8 January 1899 was the shorter of the two, it is quite vivid with its description of the terrible hardships that the miner's had to endure.

This is a personal narrative of one man's experience in the far north during an exciting period of American history. He had plenty of time, during those long winter nights, to express his feelings with the pen.

William K. McKee wrote two memorable poems during his stay in Alaska, and they are included in these letters. His poetic description of the North Pole is a classic. His other poem, *The Traveler in Alaska* is quite humorous and gives a miner's view of life near the Arctic Circle.

There is no indication that a sizeable gold

(Continued on Page Four)

The Branding Iron

THE WESTERNERS
LOS ANGELES CORRAL

Published Quarterly in
March, June, September, December

OFFICERS 1981 TRAIL BOSSES

WILLIAM O. HENDRICKS Sheriff
614 Dahlia Ave., Corona del Mar, Ca. 92625

WILLIAM W. ESCHERICH Deputy Sheriff
Box 2890, Terminal Annex, Los Angeles, CA 90051

POWELL GREENLAND Registrar of Marks
and Brands
1519 Linda Rosa Ave., Los Angeles, Ca. 90041

ERNEST MARQUEZ Roundup Foreman
24213 Hamlin St., Canoga Park, Ca. 91307

BERT H. OLSON Keeper of the Chips
619 N. Rexford Dr., Beverly Hills, Ca. 90210

DONALD DUKE Past Sheriff Trail Boss

ELWOOD W. HOLLAND ... Past Sheriff Trail Boss

APPOINTED OFFICERS

THOMAS S. McNEILL Librarian
207 Ave. G, Redondo Beach, Ca. 90277

DWIGHT S. CUSHMAN Representative
8009 Lena Ave., Canoga Park, Ca. 91304

JACK McCASKILL Asst. Registrar of
Marks and Brands

ABRAHAM HOFFMAN .. Asst. Roundup Foreman

JOHN H. URABEC Membership Chairman

RAYMUND F. WOOD . Editor, Brand Book No. 16

JOHN H. KEMBLE Historian

IRON EYES CODY Daguerrotype Wrangler

ANTHONY F. KROLL Printers Devil

WILLIAM J. WARREN
and WILLIAM J. BURKHART .. Wrangler Bosses

TODD BERENS, BILL LORENZ, DICK CUNNING-
HAM, JIM GULBRANSON, FRANK NEWTON, RAY
NICHOLSON, DON PFLEUGER, DON TORGUSON
..... Wranglers

BOB STEVENS.
CORNELL NORBY Exhibits Wranglers

Address for Exchanges
and Material Submitted for Publication:

The Roundup Foreman
ERNEST MARQUEZ

24213 Hamlin St., Canoga Park, Ca. 91307

THE BRANDING IRON solicits articles of 1,500 words
or less, dealing with every phase of the Old West.
Contributions from members and friends welcomed.

Copyright© by the Westerners
Los Angeles Corral



THE MONTHLY ROUNDUP

January

As if California did not have enough contradictions and enigmas in its history, the "Mystery Angel," a statue of an angel carved from living rock in the foothills of Madera County, continues to irritate and baffle people. No one knows who carved it, nor what the cryptic inscription "To J. M. 1841" stands for. Raymund F. Wood, who learned of the statue while he was a librarian at Fresno State College, presented the results of his research on the statue to the Corral at the January meeting. While nothing can ever be declared a certainty about the Mystery Angel, Wood believes its inscription date is authentic. The owners of the property where it is located have been there for four generations, and the statue has been there for as long as anyone remembers.

Among the possibilities accounting for the creation of the statue are the attractiveness of the area for hunting beaver pelts. It is known that fur trappers employed by the Hudson's Bay Company operated in the area, and it may be that a loyal frontiersman carved the Mystery Angel as a tribute to Dr. John McLoughlin. Or the initials may memorialize a beloved one who died in infancy. Names suggested from the audience covered a range from James Marshall to Jayne Mansfield, none of which cleared up the mystery but which did make for some interesting speculations.



From left, David Lavender, Sheriff, Bill Hendricks, Speaker, Harwood Hinton and Ray Billington at the February meeting.

Photograph by - Iron Eyes Cody

February

February's speaker was Dr. Harwood P. Hinton, professor of history at the University of Arizona and editor of *Arizona and the West*. Dr. Hinton, spending two months at the Huntington Library doing research on the life and career of John S. Chisum, shared his feelings with the Corral. Chisum was a fascinating and controversial personality, his real life bearing little resemblance to the movie image popularized by John Wayne. Chisum (1824-1884) was a wheeler-dealer from Texas who shipped huge herds of cattle on consignment while not above borrowing available herds as opportunity arose. His interracial family added an unusual dimension to his colorful life. Dr. Hinton, in carefully distinguishing between Chisum's legend and reality, provided the Corral with an entertaining and insightful portrait of a fascinating western pioneer.

March

At the March meeting Robert M. Utley, former chief historian of the National Park Service, evoked for the Corral the living sense of history to be captured in viewing at first hand the "outdoor archives" — the landscapes, buildings, and artifacts that contribute to the "feel" of the West. He traced the contributions of several historians noted for their recapturing of the sense and place of history, most notably Francis Parkman, Samuel Eliot Morison, Herbert Eugene Bolton, and Bernard De Voto. These men were

not content with armchair research. They endured the hardships of retracing the paths of exploration blazed by their subjects. Morison traveled the same route as Columbus; Parkman went over the Oregon Trail; Bolton the journey of Coronado; and De Voto the length and breadth of the continent in following the trails of Lewis and Clark and many others.

The devotion of these historians to "outdoor research" resulted in the writing of history that captured in its vividness the adventure and hardship experienced in the exploration and settlement of new frontiers, and in the process created many fine books that have proved enduring.



Corral Chips

Up to the last minute, Ray Billington kept the presses busy with a spate of publications: *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier*, was published in January by W. W. Norton and Company; "The Uses of Local History" appeared in the December 1980 *American Heritage*; and, for the salaciously oriented, a volume of bawdy limericks, *Limericks: Historical and Hysterical*, to be published by Norton in April. Ray also reviewed Stan Steiner's *The Ranchers* in the December 1980 *American West*...

Walt Wheelock attends the workshop on "Shaping the Local Historical Society" sponsored by the Congress of History of San Diego County, November 15, 1980, speaking on preparing a manuscript and how to find a

(Continued on Page Twelve)



John Bell McKee, 1860 — William's father, was a pioneer San Francisco merchant.



William K. McKee and his sister Mary in 1861.

strike was found by McKee from his letters. As a matter of fact, they didn't sound very encouraging. If he did strike it later on (past the time period of these letters), I found no evidence in the manuscripts.

It seems rather appropriate, now that the State of Alaska has been thrust to the forefront, with the discovery and production of oil, to cast a bit of lore, and revive some of those exciting days of the gold rush of '98.

Maurice I. "Bob" Hattam
Los Angeles, 1980

Kubuck River
Near mouth of Ambler
January 8th, 1899

My dear Sally,

I must assume that the most important matter in which you will be interested is my health. As I shall be very brief in this epistle because of the many objections from the mail carriers to carrying any unnecessary

overweight, I must confine myself to a mere statement of our present condition and positions — my health is good.

The only inconvenience I seem to experience is from indigestion, or more properly speaking — dyspepsia or stomach trouble or gastritis or light _____ (page torn here) atmosphere or extreme cold or change of climate or old age or hard times or hard work or home sickness or worryment because we have not as yet struck anything and I believe this has affected my appetite. Perhaps all combined have had influence in making me feel better. I should not be here but grim determination (an impossible way to evade the predicament fate has placed me in) forces me to remain in this most forlorn land. Still, I must admit my health as far as physical strength is concerned is good and I feel confident I can withstand any trouble that may present itself. The troubles to be apprehended are many and I had started in another long and detailed letter to impart my varied



William K. McKee and his family in 1898. From left: William, "Willie" Robert and wife Sally.

experience of them all and everything commencing my trip and have done so, but must defer sending this to you because of the momentous question of not burdening the mailman with an ounce overweight.

The carrying of mail in this country with sled such long distances is part of our troubles. Provided we wish to communicate with friends in other areas, that does demand serious consideration as regards the weight, lucidness and importance of the communication.

Therefore I shall again say *I am well* and excuse the language — it is d_____ COLD! It has been cold and from appearances will certainly remain cold indeed for some time to come. We have had as low as 70 degrees below zero. One man who came up with us on the *Alaska* (the steamer) was frozen to death at Christmas time. His name was Chas. Leonard and came from Oregon. Another youth about 22 or 23 years froze to death some time about the 1st of December while carrying medicine from this camp to his own on the Selanuk to his father. Another man had his feet frozen so bad that the toes were amputated. Others have had noses,

fingers, ears, hands and feet frozen, but were lucky enough to find out in time to prevent anything more serious than the cessation from all activity for a short period. My nose and ears received a severe nipping but nothing to amount to any loss, although it might have proved very hard on me if I had not noticed the seizure in proper season. This cold is very enticing. It seems to invite one out with a cordial invitation, "Do come out and feel me. I am not so bad as painted. Some say I hurt them but I'm not so cold as that. If you try me and you think, 'pshaw, this ain't very cold' and go out and feel exuberant and feel, 'isn't this glorious,'" but wait, the cold thinks, "Now I have him," and it wraps you in a cold embrace and there you are . . . trapped. It comes on you all at once. Catches you unawares, as it were, and when it strikes, the blow is a hard one. I have written a long description of this country but have not time nor space there to send. The country is not at all explored as yet. *It is too big.* There is gold here but to get at. We have good prospects from the Shungnack (another camp). We have a claim but what it will amount to, cannot say. I really have no substantial

information to give about the gold question other than we are still on the lookout and hope to find it. Various strikes of big things have been rumored about but when we followed up have been greeted with from very small nuggets to nothing. Then A. Lash Hook the owner of the LePan (claim) and others have lost all attraction to finding anything big at this place but have faith that we will find something on the Ambler.

I cannot give you my triumphant words I spoke about before I left you. I rec'd. your kind and joyfully welcomed letter and it gave me the greatest of comfort. I hope and pray everything is still o.k. I have a few curios for Willie and when I get back will certainly take them with me. I have deerskin stocking for you which will keep your feet warm. I hope to bring Bob his nugget and return myself to you whole and undefeated and in good and robust health. I sincerely pray you and the boys are enjoying good health and everything is as it should be. I have had several misfortunes befall me, but I cannot now state them. We look on such things up here as little things, and if anything happens to us up in this country short of downright knockout, we look lightly on it.

I hope to return with my whole skin and not reduced in capacity any. But now I am getting near to the end and I cannot give you much news other than we have not as yet struck anything worthy of note. I must advance to the question.

I learned that war (Spanish-American) has ended and hope it will not be succeeded by another. Mr. Ralston, a friend of Mr. Harpsh has sent me a note from the Pan (LePan claim) that nothing has been found up there. Barny White has joined forces with a small number from Seattle and so far as I can learn is in good health. I send you a picture of my companion and partner in this region.

I can think of nothing more at present so hoping and praying for your prosperity and health and happiness. I remain your ever faithful and trusting husband.

Will

P.S. Do not send newspapers. It costs too much for the mail. I will send a wildflower I gathered last fall and press it for Willie. The

sun left us for six weeks without returning. We had the moon light and day since the middle part of November. This is a queer country.

Kubuk River
Near Ambler River
Sunday, September 25th 1898

Dear Sally,

I sit me down tonight at my own table to write for the first time with any comfort or convenience for so doing, since April 28th last. Nearly five months. So I look back through the happenings and experiences that befell my single self during that eventful period; I note the strained tension one must undergo to carry out successfully a trip of this kind. Every faculty must be kept on the alert. One's whole being seems to be centered in the one thought, to get there without any mishap.

The unsettled condition of one's self and transferring of supplies and personal effects — together with keeping track of your goods and having you all meet at the proposed destination is a job that requires strict attention to business.

The methods and accommodations on a whaling ship and the attention and proper management given by the officers of such a ship who have had no experience with passengers, in dealing with so many people as were on board the *Alaska* in her eventful trip, are not at all favorable for a satisfactory consummation of a project or undertaking such as mine. I am, however, here, safe for the present and all my goods and chattels safely housed for the winter and I thank the Almighty for it; and nothing else.

Our cabin is built of logs well sodded on the outside; the size inside is 13' x 15'. Our floor and other such material is stored overhead on beams. What supplies we need for this winter are packed in boxes on one side and are handy to get at. Pilgrim's bunk is on one corner and mine is opposite. Our table is between. The stove is about four feet away from the foot of my bunk.

We have a woodshed build at the front end of our cabin and it too is of logs and well

sodded and protected. I consider we are as comfortably fixed as any of them. There are about 60 men in winter quarters here and we all occupy about a mile or mile and a half in stretch of the river. Up in height about 50 feet from the river. There are no natives near us nor any that I know of, nearer than from a hundred to a hundred fifty miles.

The water in the river is now very low — it has fallen from 8 to 10 feet from the 6th of Sept. to now — and will keep falling until it freezes up which we expect to occur somewhere about October 10, next.

The Steamer, *John Reilly* is on a sand bar and cannot be moved, and we have no hopes that she can survive the ordeal of the ice breaking up in the summer. It is a sad mishap and is a great loss for Capt. Cogan. The steamer was a good one for this river, and if anything is stuck here — would have been a bonanza for its owner.

I have several places picked out where we intend to work after it freezes up. We cannot sink a shaft now because of too much water which cannot be gotten rid of, and the best time to work such affairs is when the ground is all frozen. It is hard work, but must be done that way. I live in great hopes.

I am very much mistaken if there is no gold found right here where we are. I feel very confident and my disappointment will be keen if I do not find it.

Sept. 26th: A light fall of snow this morning. We can see it falling heavy in the mountain tops in the distance. Tonight is a beautiful night. The moon is shining bright and it's beams on the river as far away as it seems a scene worth a great deal.

October 10th: Since writing the above, I have been kept quite busy and as the work is hard, felt more inclined to rest my weary bones.

Even though the moon shines bright, and calm and peaceful, and everything looks serene and beautiful, this country does not come anywhere near being a paradise for us to live in. It is a rough experience for us "pioneers" to the Kubuck and Ambler. I do not think you care to have me enumerate all the trials, troubles and various tribulations we are forced to pass through, and I am certain I am not at all anxious to recall them

to mind. Nothing has occurred out of the ordinary and everything seems to drag along it's dreary monotonous way along the path of time. We are still poking along with (I will say it) uncountable numbers of preparations for our winter and spring sojourn here. It seems as if we could never be done.

Still, I think of you and the children every day and home, and wonder and wonder. How is everything? And my thoughts answer, "Surely everything is alright. Don't fret. Time flies faster in Oakland than here and it don't seem so long to the folks at home that you have been away as it does to you. Don't worry about them but get the gold then get home." I pray that you are all o.k. and that everything is as it should be. God grant you health and strength and health, happiness and prosperity.

The river has not frozen as yet and we expect it to be almost any day. What they call here slush ice is floating down and the edges of our river is freezing night and morning.

October 22nd: We commenced a shaft yesterday, some distance away from our cabin. It is on my discovery. The indications are very favorable. I do not know how deep we will be forced to go but we will keep at it until we reach bed rock. The river froze up October 15th and everything is froze up here as tight as a drum. Plenty of snow fell last night.

October 28th: We are suspicious that something has been found up the Ambler and we formed a party of some of the boys to go up there and find out about it. Things are going along about the same — nothing new of any importance turns up.

The river is frozen hard and fast. Skating is going on. No snow of any moment is here yet. I judge it to be too cold for that. And cold? Where is the man who said it wasn't cold in Alaska. I think Joaquin Miller or some writer for the *Examiner* said that. It may not have been cold? But I say, "Ain't it cold!!!" You bet its cold. Today it registered 10 degrees below zero. Hoopla — if that ain't cold I don't know what is. Ice froze an inch thick last night in the cabin on our water buckets. Thats pretty cold I would say when a fire was kept all day and up 'till 9 at night.

On October 20th we cut ice for our winter

use. This ice must be cut out of the river and stacked on it's banks to be used for water. By stacked I mean each piece must be stood on end and not flat against another piece or else they will freeze together, so when the ice was 8 inches thick we went to work. First we chop a hole large enough to work a whipsaw. Then saw a cut about 20 feet long and then chop another hole and saw at right angles about 20 feet, then chop another hole and saw again at right angles and parallel to the first cut. A fellow chops every four feet.

Now you have a hole. Then the chopping is finished. Continue sawing blocks of ice about 4 feet x 2 feet. A fellow hauls the blocks out of the hole with a boat hook and pushes them to the shore where a man or two men stand them up on the beach. The ice hole is about from 60 to 100 feet away from the place where the ice is stacked. So you desire to have water — you go down to the ice stack and cut off a chunk and pack it to your shack or hut to be melted, and such is the water supply in winter on the Kubuck. You must mind and have about two week's supply of ice just outside your cabin door in case blizzards and snowstorms hem you in for that length of time.

There is no fear of loosing any of the ice by means of melting or dripping away. It is safe to say and calculate on finding as much in quantity as you left there. A singular peculiarity I notice about this ice — when the atmosphere is coldest, then the ice is warmest. I mean feels warmest. I handled ice today with my bare fingers and found no feeling of chill in the ice. In fact I found it far handier to handle with my hands than any other way. The ice feels dry like bone.

Oct. 31st: This is the night spirits are said to gather up their dry and long resting bones and march out of the grave and walk about the earth visiting, and I sit here alone in my lonesome cabin. I wonder to myself if such things happen in this out-of-the-way place. I imagine not. Surely the spirit finding itself at liberty to wander about would choose some more inviting land in which to take their "siesta." Unless it might be the spirits from Hades who desire for climatic reasons to take advantage of their night of freedom and cool off.

Outside, the moon is shining it's brightest, and the sky is clear, and the snow-capped mountains appear plain and distinct in the distance. The wind moans a mournful dirge through the trees — and the dogs are howling forth such pitying cries that it does seem as if wondering ghosts might conclude this a congenial place to pass a few moments.

I am glad I am not a timid being. If I was, I should feel very sorry for myself situated as I am at the present moment. I think the loneliness of this place would drive any timorous person distracted. An imaginative timorous party on such a night as this would suffer horribly, for this place is the forlorn lonely of the lonesome.

From what this country is in my mind, I have taken a step further, and conjured up a thought on the North Pole.

*This is the region of quiet solemnity —
the patrol ground of silentness —
This is the spot of soundless sublimity —
the country seat of quietness —
Noiseless old time takes it's flight in
steady gracefulness —
Breathless it does duty in sight of this
home of solemn calmness —
In this vast solitude which seems the
approach to the beyond —
The outpost of eternity, where time begins
to end;
Appears to be Earth's resting couch and
all is hushed
In preparation for dissolution.
This is the Domeless Cathedral where one
can commune with the soul,
Fearless of interruption.
This is the Paradise where living death
holds sway in lonely grandeur.
A tombless grave for humanity!*

And I have thought that one is summoned to meet his God, this would be a fitting place.

Nov. 1st: Very cold today, Must keep your ears well covered. Also woolen mittens on the hand while at work. Fingers and ears will become frozen very quick, and before you know it unless you use proper precautions.

This afternoon 4 visitors came into camp: Dr. Coffin, Mr. Baldwin, and two other guests whose names I did not catch. I am not a good

hand at remembering names. I found out later they were Dr. Gleaves and Mr. Little. These gentlemen are out with a sled on the ice on an exploring expedition and of course are glad to have the opportunity to stop a night in a populous berg such as this.

Last evening Mr. Doud and Mr. Jones had a visitor and Jones told me this morning an amusing yarn about their experience with him. It seems that "Mama" Doud (that's the nickname for Mr. Doud) espied a couple with sleds coming up the river and as he is our worthy gossip, was the first to meet them. One was an Irishman and the other a native, and they were on the way to meet Dr. LaFrance (all doctors here). The Irishman asked readily if he could find a place where he could make some bread and put up for the night, and Doud, wishing to be accomodating, offered the traveler the welcome of his cabin. The fellow brought his flour up, his stuff for supper, and his Indian — and baked his bread and sat the afternoon out by the warm fire in Joe Doud's cabin — used Doud's utensils and made himself comfortable.

When supper time came, he goes down to the river, comes back, asks for a cup, takes a bottle of whiskey from his pocket, pours out a drink, and hands it over to the Indian, takes a good swig himself, corks the bottle, and puts it back in his pocket, and hands back the cup, smacks his lips and proceeds to make his supper. Joe Doud and his partner are there looking on.

The fellow sleeps there that night and evidently takes his drink in the morning — and one also to the Indian — cooks his breakfast, thanks the two hosts for their "civility" and departs. "How's that?"

I told Jones, that's Doud's partner, the fellow thought they looked like temperance people, and didn't drink. Jones says, "He might have asked if he had a mouth on them or taken his bloody drink down at the river and not have brought it up to the cabin." If he hadn't seen the liquor he wouldn't have minded. I told Jones perhaps he thought the liquor wasn't good enough for them. "Gen" Blacks says its the first Irishman he ever knew of or imagined to do a trick like that. The cheekiest act he ever heard of. "I'd like to see anyone doing that in my cabin. I'm

blowed if he wouldn't get an invitation to walk," he said.

Nov. 2nd: My birthday — and the ink is frozen hard. Had to thaw it out. Who says it doesn't get cold in Alaska. I got up this morning and had my breakfast, went out to our prospect hole about six miles — (Pilgrim has been away on an expedition for 5 days) stayed all day, came back, got my supper and am now at night writing this and haven't seen a living soul nor spoken to one all day. How's that for a birthday. I was just thinking — 40 years ago today I did the very self same trick — only there was a difference. Some one was speaking to me — my poor mother. I wonder how she is today. I hope and pray she she is well and happy. I hope and pray you are all happy. God grant it, and God grant that on my next birthday I may be home with you all and we may all be happy together. I don't much feel like writing tonight.

Nov. 5th: "Rags" came back this morning before I got up. Rags is our dog — Esquimoux dog — one of them. He was with the party of explorers. Rags, I suppose got tired somewhere in the mountains and found his way back. "Rags" is a deserter. Perhaps the party are returning and Mr. Rags thought they were too slow — came on ahead. I will know in a day or two.

But!!! Who's the man who said it wasn't cold in Alaska? Where is that man? If you hear him say it — trust him not. He's a delusion and a snare. This A.M.: 22 degrees below zero — whoa! Mama! Say! — When any man or woman tells you they don't think its cold in Alaska or at least so very cold as "they say it is," just you say flat-footed, and stick to it, "IT IS COLD!!! Now I ought to know. I have a husband up there, and he ought to know something about it — and he says, 'its not very cold?' But its COLD Fridgitivity and if that isn't cold I don't know what cold is," says you. Say the warm air that the pillow absorbed during the day frosted on the pillow under my head during the night. Now then — the man that says it isn't cold in Alaska — he's got marbles in his pate. That's all I got to say.

And tomorrow will be Bobby's birthday and he will be seven years of age. Good little

Bobby — your Papa remembers you and when your Mama reads you this, you will be many months more than seven years old — but you can know your papa thought of you on your birthday and that he will always think of you and Willie and your mama. When Willie's birthday comes around your Papa will perhaps be starting for home, at least he hopes to be, but it will be quite a long time after that before he can get home. He will only get home in time for his own birthday, Nov. 2 — because it takes a long time to go from here to Oakland, and many a weary mile must be travelled — But your papa is in hopes he will bring home abundance of yellow metal .

Your mama has a birthday too, next February and Papa will think of her very much on that day and when you are sending around valentines, your Papa will try and imagine he rec'd one entitled, "The Alaska Miner."

Dec. 14th: During the month of November we had a dreary, monotonous time. Everything seemed to be in such a shape that we could go nowhere nor could we do much except drag along. The sun is down to the edge of our horizon and we barely see the half of it at noon. We use lots of candles and everything points to a long seige of tendiousness.

December 4 -5 -6 -7 -8: Very windy and stormy days. On the 7th it snowed very hard.

December 8th: The snow is now 18 inches deep and cold as the devil can make it. 42 degrees below zero.

Dec. 10th: Von Knoblesdorff and 2 natives and a boy with 7 dogs and a sled arrived with mail from St. Michaels. Rec'd. a letter from you dated Aug. 7th and mailed Aug. 16th. You cannot imagine my joy in hearing from you; everything in your letter was eagerly read and I am sorry to say that I felt so comforted in receiving your letter that I could not feel one spark of sadness on learning therefrom that Evers and McClymonds are dead.

I am so glad you are all well and things are going along smoothly and so glad you all think about me and remember me. Tell Bob he must have a nugget and I have a few curios for Willie. My dear, may joy be yours

while I'm away. I'll come to you as soon as I can.

Dec. 11-12-13: Mail man and Indians and dogs stayed with us. Struck here — can't go any farther. No food for the dogs. We had the natives carry some wood down for us.

Dec. 14th: Natives returned home and left mailman whom we have nicknamed, "The Flying Dutchman" and he likes it. One of the natives promised to return in 2 sleeps and bring us 20 fish and then he and Von K. and Pilgrim are to go up to the Par and other places and deliver mail and then on their return go over to the Shungnack and stake claims.

We expected Cutcarluk, a native we have engaged, to return today — probably the storm kept him. We heard today that the people on the Shungnack had staked out from 3 to 5 claims each. This is illegal and we don't propose to allow any such hogging game to be played on us. If any good claims are there, when we go up we will see to it.

Dec. 17th: No native — so Pilgrim and Von. K. started for the Par, Calamute and Shungnack, and expect him to be gone 3 or 4 weeks — 4 dogs and sled & provisions.

Dec. 20 — Awful cold — 44 degrees below.
Dec. 21 — 46 below. Dec. 22 — 51 degrees below — awful cold. Dec. 23rd — 62 degrees below. December 25th — AWFUL COLD! 70 degrees below zero!

Santa Claus came and each of the men in camp rec'd. a jewsharp; each woman a made-up doll made of birch wood and dressed in calico — quite surprising — caused a sensation.

Dec. 26th: Weather has moderated somewhat.

Dec. 27th: " "

Dec. 28th: " "

Dec. 29th: Cold as hill (hell)

Dec. 30th: " "

Dec. 31st: " " and the old year dies. Goodbye old 1898. We'll never see you again. I pray '99 will bring to me good luck. The boys were out chiavarying and tried to get me out but I tumbled and had the doors barred. They didn't get me.

January 8th: Wrote a hurried letter to you and sent it by mail today. Was rushed from start to finish. Don't hardly remember now

what I said. I think I forgot to say scurvy is rampant here. Every one has a dread of catching — and all are using willow-bark tea and a decoction from balm of gilead blossoms.

January 12th: Blowing hard and cold as usual. I think I will give up trying to give this thing in detail. It is so cold. It seems to me that all I can write is that its cold . . . awful cold! If ever I catch that man who said it wasn't cold in Alaska, I think I will take a full out of him.

I am now engaged writing a piece of poetry and on the next page you will see my starter for it. Joaquin Miller is supposed to ask a question of a traveller — "A Traveler in Alaska"

Cold? "I should say so!" said the traveler in reply —

To the question, Do you think it might be cold by and by.

"Cold"!!, he continued, "Is it cold when your fingers

Feel nothing that they touch? And yet lingers in magnet cohesion,

And electric strife on the blade of your axe Or your jack-knife strips the flesh,

'Til the warm blood tingles to the firebell of your brain

And Jingles.

Load up the furnace full — make the next station

At your fastest gait, or hell will be our ration

If we get there too late.

Is it warm, partner? Say so and it will be a blessing

To hear one human being say,

Jack Frost is not caressing his fingers or his nose;

And someone is not thinking of turning up his toes.

For by great Jupiter and Saturn and all the mighty stars,

If this here is a warm pattern I am done for —

And a fact which is plain fit to be locked up in asylum for insane.

You say its real cold and you were only 'joshing.'

Now partner, "Real cold" means only tossing. A brand in the fire of my wonderment at

your joshing a poor fellow

In such a blooming stew.

Real cold is not in it — all the cuss words My tongue could lay to, would not be just words

Enough to lend my thoughts to your ear, To this chilly, icy, frigid, cold atmosphere.

Fire! Did I say fire?

Lead me in, partner, do

To your comfortable headquarters —

And I'll forget it, and freezing northers —

And be one of the warmest members

Of all your jolly crew.

A man by name of Charles Hay died in February in this camp; it being our only death so far. We buried him on the summit of a knoll back of his cabin. It was a sad sight, and a sorrowful thought to bury a poor fellow mortal in this out of the way place. We buried another man named Gross at Ambler. Many are sick with the scurvy or Black Leg as it is called. It is a singular disease, or more properly stated, a peculiar malady that attacks the lower limbs and gradually crawls upward and affects the heart. It weakens and saps the strength and is lingering and slow and when once it takes hold, its hard to eradicate or hard to evict from the system. It clogs and retards the circulation and breaks out in black blotches and sometimes the whole leg and body becomes black. It causes heart failure. Thank God I have escaped it.

During January and February we had frightful cold weather and it stormed and blowed. We have had expeditions to the Shungnack and have found nothing here. I fear I will have to go home empty handed. Too bad, but can't be helped. I feel so disappointed but my star of hope has not sunk. We must pray. Most everyone has given up though. There is nothing in this country.

March was a fearful month. It blew and blew. I have had a narrow squeak with a bad cold; four days in bed, but am slowly getting over it. In the early part of April the snow continued to thaw.

April 11th: It is pretty cold this morning. This is our marriage anniversary; I think 17 years ago. I hope we will enjoy our next 17 years with more bliss, and although we have

not been so bad off as some, still we could have been better off.

April 14th: Heard of strike at Cape Nome and Pilgrim and Dey are away for it.

April 19th: Pilgrim started for the gold fields and we are pretty sure to have a claim there. Pray to God it may be a good one. We had plenty of snow in April. We are building boats to leave when the river breaks up.

May 19th: Glory!



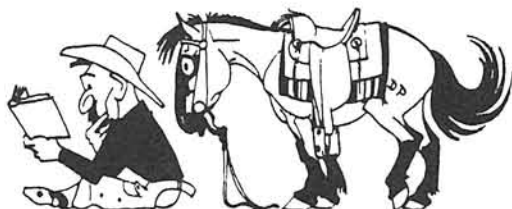
Corral Chips...

publisher. He and *Bill Burkhart* also attend the IX Gran Quivira Conference at Las Cruces, New Mexico, October 10-12, 1980... C. M. *David Kuhner* is the co-editor of *Bibliotheca De Re Metallica*, the catalogue of the famous reference library used by Herbert Hoover and his wife in the early 1900s to translate *De Re Metallica*, a classic work on mining and metallurgy. The catalogue has been issued by The Libraries of the Claremont Colleges, and the printing has been done by Andrew Hoyem's Arion Press in San Francisco... C. M. *Gene Bear* m.c.'s the Burbank Firehouse 2nd Annual Chili Cook-off to benefit the Alisa Ann Ruch Burn Foundation, on March 22...

Dwight Cushman addresses the Conejo Valley Genealogical Society on "A Talk on the Religions in Colonial America." He is also temporary Chairman of the newly organized San Fernando Valley Genealogical Society, which recently held its third meeting... *Abe Hoffman* is the author of "The Los Angeles Aqueduct Investigation Board of 1912: A Reappraisal," in the Winter 1980 issue of *Southern California Quarterly*...

C. M. *Leland Case* receives an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Black Hills State College, his sixth honorary degree... *Bill Kimes* presents a paper at the University of the Pacific's John Muir Conference, along with scholars from Alaska to Massachusetts. The occasion was to publicize

UOP's microfilming project of all of Muir's unpublished manuscripts. Bill serves as consultant to the project. He has also spoken to the Foothill Sierra Club, the Merced-Mariposa Retired Teachers, and the Friends of Mariposa Library... C. M. *Art Beeman's* 35-year-old photograph of old-time Santa Inez Valley cowboy "Wild Bill" Nicholas appears in the February 1981 *Westways*...



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL ...

Photographing the Frontier, by Thomas and Dorothy Hoobler, G. P. Putnam's Sons, Inc., New York, 1980, 160 pages, \$9.95.

Nearly 30 years ago, while on a narrow-gauge excursion on the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway between Salida and Montrose, Colorado, I sat next to a bespectacled old gentleman who held the window seat. As the train began to climb the grade of historic Marshall Pass, this fellow noted that I was straining to see out and take pictures of the train as steam and smoke poured from the smokestack. He offered me the window location and introduced himself as William Henry Jackson, Jr., the son of the famous pioneer photographer of the American West. Quite naturally I was more interested in this man than the scenery outside.

Jackson had published a book about his father prior to World War II which contained many of his father's photographs still in his possession. He sent me a copy of the book with annotation comments alongside many of the illustrations.

Stories of this great western photographer, how he worked, what he took with him on hikes for illustrations, what his darkroom set up was like, his father's color process

(Continued on Page Fifteen)

Arthur H. Clark

Pioneer Publisher of Western History

by Robert A. Clark



ARTHUR H. CLARK, Sr.

In 1868 a second son was born to a prosperous tailor living in London, England; a son who was to show ability in school, a love of reading, and a dedication to the goals he set for himself. When time came to take the entrance examination for Oxford University at age 16, the boy passed easily, and began his studies at that most honored university. Sudden financial reverses struck the family, however, and the young man was forced to leave Oxford after only three months of study, with an Associate of Arts degree.

At age 16, young Arthur Henry Clark was thus forced to make a momentous decision,

one which showed his singularity of purpose and commitment — he chose to become an apprentice in the firm of Henry Sotheran Company, a firm which epitomized the traditional book dealer in England. Sotheran's was both a publisher of new works and a broker in the antiquarian as well. And in this environment young Clark took his first steps in the book world, a path he was to pursue until his passing in 1951, and which is continued in his name today by family and friends.

As an apprentice, young Clark was of course to experience all the different phases of the work performed in the traditional book house, beginning at the bottom and working through one department after another — from cataloging and selling used and antiquarian titles, to learning the design and production of new publications. In the course of his apprenticeship he was assigned to do cataloging for the British Museum, where he made the acquaintance of, and was influenced by, such notables of English literature as Robert Lewis Stevenson, John Ruskin, Lord Tennyson, Rudyard Kipling, and others. In 1888, toward the end of his five-year service, he was put in charge of the development and production of an entire catalog for Sotheran's, 336 pages long, which he completed with skill and professionalism.

Young Clark began to consider leaving England when his apprenticeship ended, and seeking his fortune in Canada, Australia, or the United States. Providentially, he met General Alexander C. McClurg, owner of the A.C. McClurg Co., prominent booksellers and publishers in Chicago. McClurg informally offered a position to the young Englishman, telling him to come directly to his offices in Chicago upon completion of his

apprenticeship.

Chicago was hot and sticky in August of 1889 when Arthur Clark arrived and went directly to McClurg's offices. What little money he began his journey with was nearly gone. He was shocked to hear the General was on vacation and would not be back for three weeks. Furthermore, the manager knew nothing of any arrangements for the young immigrant's employment, and was very hesitant to risk hiring him without authority. As the spectre of hungry days, and nights on the streets, loomed up, he pleaded with the manager for work of any sort until the General returned. He was fortunately hired on a temporary basis, and as soon as McClurg returned from vacation, all was settled.

He began his employment in both the cataloging department and in the publication of new books and the famous literary periodical, *The Dial*, then published by McClurg.

After three years of steady work with no time off, Clark was given two months leave and returned to England to visit family and friends. After discussing the matter with his father, he decided the time was ripe to strike out on his own, and he notified McClurg's of his intention not to return. His father loaned him £500, guaranteed his credit at several important bookdealers in England, and he purchased a large stock of books which were forwarded to the States. Immediately upon his return to Chicago, he issued two catalogs in October and December 1892, and began selling books from his two-room office in the Adams Express Building.

Some orders were received, and some books sold, but the income barely covered the rent, printing expenses, and the salary of his lone associate, George Andrews. As a result, the young entrepreneur began missing his regular three meals a day, and things began to look bleak.

Providence was at hand, however, and the famous Cleveland firm of Burrows Brothers, having just bought out their primary rival and hoping to crush whatever competition was left in the Cleveland book trade, was seeking a new director for their rare book department and publishing enterprises. Clark was recommended to them as the best man for the job, and Mr. Burrows sought him out

in Chicago and made an offer Clark could not refuse. He would buy out his stock of books, pay for their shipment to Cleveland, cover the remaining lease on his office, put him on the Burrows' Board of Directors, send him to England to buy more books at no personal expense, and pay a handsome salary besides. Clark jumped at the chance, although Mr. Burrows had to wait overnight for an answer.

Some of Clark's best customers followed him to the Burrows' house, purchasing \$2300 worth of books in the first few weeks, thus securing his position in the eyes of his new employers. Eighteen ninety-three, then, was the beginning of a new direction in a new town, and Clark made the most of it by developing a project which was to set a pattern in publishing he would follow all his life.

Dr. Reuben Gold Thwaites, Director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, was fascinated by the tremendous wealth of manuscript material left by the Jesuit missionaries in the Mississippi Valley. He met with Clark and discussed the possibility of transcribing and publishing some of the documents in a large series of books, to be presented in both the original language and English, on facing pages. At that very moment Frederick Jackson Turner was turning the eyes of young historians throughout the country, and especially at the University of Wisconsin, toward the frontier and its impact on the nation, and the interest in documentary sources in western American history was ready to blossom. Clark was sure of the commercial possibilities for the series' sale. Thwaites was sure that the zealous disciples of Turner would be ready to help him with the herculean task. All that was left was to convince the Board of Burrows Brothers.

In spite of the almost universal opinion of publishers on the East Coast that the proposed series would be a financial disaster, Clark was able to sell his project to the Board. They agreed that if Clark was able to make a success of the venture, he would receive 10% of the profits. The die was cast.

The work, titled *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* . . . was issued between 1892 and

1901 in 73 volumes. It was both a commercial and critical success, and turned a profit of \$120,000 — and Burrows Brothers began to hedge in paying the 10% Clark knew he had earned. After numerous conferences and conflicts, Clark finally appealed to an attorney friend for help, and he received payment. He also decided he had had enough of working for others.

Seeking and raising \$75,000 capital, Arthur Clark founded and chartered The Arthur H. Clark Company on March 4, 1902, in Cleveland, Ohio. He promptly issued Catalog #1, listing rare and choice books, from the Garfield Building.

Besides the sale of rare and choice Americana, Clark immediately undertook the publication of several important series of books. The first three series to be published were the sixteen volume *Historic Highways of America*, edited by Archer B. Hulbert, the fifty-five volume *Phillipine Islands* series, edited by Blair and Robertson, and Dr. Thwaites *Early Western Travels* in thirty-two volumes. The latter was extremely successful and Clark's reputation was established.

The core of the company's history has been its publishing tradition, with 425 separate titles issued in the 79 years of its existence. The vast majority have made solid contributions to the documentary history of the American West. The company is still actively publishing and selling books, both its own, and scarce and out-of-print titles dealing with the West, from its Glendale office, where Arthur Clark, Sr., moved the firm in 1930. At the hands of the throttle today are Arthur H. Clark, Jr., and Paul W. Galleher, both former sheriffs of the Los Angeles Corral. Paul joined the firm in 1921, while studying engineering in college.

Arthur H. Clark, Sr., publisher and bookseller, passed away on May 15, 1951. He achieved much in his lifetime. His publications received numerous accolades, including the Pulitzer Prize. His company was known internationally for its high standards and quality workmanship. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Mississippi Valley Historical Review and the Pacific Historical Review. But more than any of these accomplishments, he was loved by his family and

friends, and his memory remains fresh and inspiring. In the words of George P. Hammond, Director of the Bancroft Library, "Few men, I am sure, did so much as he to encourage the publication of new materials on the West, and few did so much to maintain an outstanding level of fine printing. Such achievements will live long."

Robert A. Clark is the grandson of A.H. Clark, Sr., and editorial director in the Clark Company. This article is an outgrowth of a talk presented to the Huntington Corral of the Westerners on February 21, 1981.

DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL ...

which was developed long before that of Eastman Kodak came on the scene, were told. He explained the determination of his father to try and preserve the images of the growing West as he saw it.

Photographing the Frontier is a further extension of what Jackson told me first hand. This is a feast for the photographic historian. Many do not realize that the invention of photography as we know it virtually coincided with the opening of the American West, and for the first time in history an era was recorded as it actually happened. This volume tells the story of the great pioneer cameramen who used wagons and pack mules to reach those lofty places with their 14x14 glass plate cameras. Men like A. J. Russell who photographed the building of the transcontinental railroad, and Carleton E. Watkins who covered California and Arizona during the pioneer period. Men like Charles Savage who photographed Utah and Kansas, or William Soule who traveled the Army posts and Indian camps of the great Southwest. There are more than 100 pioneer photographers discussed in this classic.

While the Western frontier lasted barely half a century, it was well photographed and how it was done and by whom is here. The text portion of this volume is lively, authentic, and descriptive, yet only 50 illustrations are presented in this "how it was really done" adventure. No matter, the photographic collector and historian will be pleased.

— Donald Duke

The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890: A Social History, by Richard Griswold del Castillo. University of California Press, 1979, 217 pp., \$16.95.

Since the late 1960s Mexican Americans have emerged as the most rapidly growing ethnic group in Los Angeles, both numerically and in political significance. As the city celebrates its 200th birthday, it seems ironic that Mexican Americans should still be considered in potential rather than actual political terms. After all, Spanish colonist, or at the very least citizens of New Spain, founded the pueblo in 1781. Numerically the Californios were in the majority in the city's population until 1860. Yet very little is known of the Spanish-speaking community after California became an American state, beyond the research done on the elite class of rancho owners.

Richard Griswold del Castillo does much to remedy the historical lacunae and to establish a continuity between the Californios of 1850-1890 and the Chicanos of the present day. His work succeeds on several levels. As a demographic study, its many charts and tables demonstrate the depth of the author's research and provide information on Californio urban occupations, literacy, political participation and influence, and family structure. At the same time, the author traces the difficulties of cultural adjustment to Anglo customs and expectations, doing so in a readable narrative that captures the pain and poignancy of a society eclipsed by events beyond its control.

While the author confirms some views of Californios held by historians, he adds a fuller dimension to the portrait of Californio life by concentrating on the urban residents of Los Angeles. In doing so he is able to modify or offer new perspectives. We learn that Californios living in Los Angeles were highly transient; that while rancho owners lost their lands through litigation and natural disasters, urban Californios were buying town lots and forming a distinctive barrio, or community, life in the city; that between the Californio elite and working class Mexican Americans there grew an increasing cultural gulf as wealthy Californios embraced Anglo

values. The persistence of Hispanic names in local and state political offices has been misleading for this era, since those names belonged to leaders who failed to represent the full Spanish-speaking community. The Catholic Church likewise came to identify with non-Mexican Catholics and upper-class Californios, leaving the numerically larger poorer class to attend services at the modest plaza church.

Although much of the story has its negative aspects, Mexican Americans endured the segregation and prejudice that came with the Anglos and emerged with a strong sense of community. They published newspapers, adjusted as well as possible to the new ground rules set by Anglo society, and tried mightily to understand why "most Anglos regarded them as Mexicans, a foreign group destined to disappear as had the Indians." More than three dozen tables and maps provide statistical information, along with 14 photographs, some rare, others familiar to students of local history. There are a few too many misspellings of names, both of historical characters and scholars cited, and the index is too brief. Beyond these minor shortcomings, Griswold's book offers keen insights into the struggle and decline of Los Angeles' pioneer generations.

—Abraham Hoffman

Corresponding Members Welcomed by Corral

The Los Angeles Corral of the Westerners welcomes the following new Corresponding members.

Will Burlingame, Huntington Beach
Gene Bear, Sunland
John F. Albright, Anaheim
Jacquelyn F. Wilson, Pasadena
Leslie Carey, Jr., Sepulveda
Weber-McCrea Co., Glendale
John L. Bright, Tujunga
Marc B. Griffey, New York, N.Y.
Carl Chase, Long Beach
Kenneth E. Pauley, San Pedro
Dr. Roger M. Baty, Redlands