




Journal Entries Transcript

Van Valen Gold Rush Journal Day 1: January, 1849

Incidents of a Voyage from New York to California and the Gold regions. Via Cape Horn in the year Eighteen Hundred & Forty-Nine, by Alex Van Valen, Mathew Van Siclan, Stephen P. Clarke, William Byxber, & Rich c J. Paulison all of the City of New York. It may not be amiss here to state the cause, and organisation of the above named Company. about the close of the year Eighteen Hundred & Forty Eight numerous paragraphs appeared in the different newspapers & journals published in the City, giving glowing accounts of the larger quantities of Gold obtained in California, which were corroborated by many Private communications. the excitement became intense and the Gold Fever as it was called, carried many a deluded wretch away from his family, friends, and sometimes a profitable employment. at first it was considered a delusion, but soon however from accounts almost daily received, and also government dispatches soon satisfied the Poeples that it was no longer a Humbug, and numerous Companys were organising in diferents parts of the Country, and Vessels freighted with Provisions, tools



and all the necessaries for a long Voyage to California were almost a daily occurrence. The above named persons were selected and they through the aid of Mess Henry Akin & B S Clark of the City of New York as Capitalists, formed themselves into a Company under the name and title of the “California Mutual Gold Mining Company.” the result of which will be shown hereafter


Monday Jany 22^{ts}, 1849 Left the Port of New York in Bark Hersilia

Capt Baxter, with 84 passengers & Crew Bound for San Francisco Cala. 9 am left Pier 6 North River in Tow of the Steam Boat Suffolk. proceeded down the Bay in fine Style, when off Staten Island received a Salut of 6 guns, from the Shore, which was returned with hearty cheers from the Ship, when off Sandy Hook, after bidding farewell to our friends who...

Accompanied us with the Steam Boat. the line was off. our Sails Sett, and we proceeded on our Voyage with a light Wind from the North West. half past 3 P.M lost sight of the Highlands of the Neversink in New Jersey, which is the last point of Land visible to Vessels going to Sea

Van Valen Gold Rush Journal Day 20: February, 1849

Wednesday Feb 14, 1849. 6 a.no. Cloudy. Weather mild, light winds and variable, we now begin to feel the inconvenience of a Small Ship crowded with Pass-



-engers, a Small Cabin crowded with Baggage & no Ventillation, and to make the place still more disagreeable especially in the warm Latitudes the Cabin is furnished with 3 or 4 dirty & half trimmed Oil Lamps, which emits a Smoke equal to a Blast furnace. 12 m Lat 10° 25' North Long 25° 05' West. nothing worthy of note occurred the remainder of the day. I find it quite a task, especially one like myself who have allways been engaged in other pursuits than writing, to find material about which to write. there is much of a Sameness on Ship Board day after day, and seldom anything occurs to change the Monotony of the Scenes. Thursday Feby, 15, 1849 5 am. Arose this morning and took a Bath, which is performed in the following maner, some 4 or 5 club together, one of which takes a Bucket, draws the water and dashes it upon the rest & Visa Versa. Weather warm light wind from the North East. The Temperature of the weather about the same as July or August in New York. 12 m, Lat 8° 01' North. Long 25° 05' West.

Crew and Passenger List for the gold rush Ship *Hersilia*, 1849

Alex Baxter Capt
 J Hopkins 1st Mate
 Mr. Abley 2nd do
 Mr. Bodfish 3rd do
 7 Seamen

 Passengers
 C.B. Reynolds NY
 J. Sawyer “
 D. Drake “
 S. Baker “
 H. B. Braston R.I
 C.F. Rea “
 Wm Larned “
 Wm Levins “
 J. A. Sanger
 Thos Barnes “
 J. Conley N.Y.
 E.B. Hegeman “
 A.D. Chapin “
 R Atwill “
 W. Willis “
 S. Cunningham “
 H. F. Joseph
 C. Bucklin “
 Mr Brower “
 Mr. Winslow R.I
 A. Mobray NY
 Mr King R.I
 Mr Wacob NY
 Mr Oakly “
 H.C. Gardiner R.I


J. Sherman “
 Mr Isbel Conn
 H.B. Congdon R.I
 T.H. Carr “
 S.V. Carr RI
 S.L. Hale “
 A. Morgan “
 A. Van Valen NY
 M Van Siclen “
 R. J. Paulison “
 Wm Byxbee “
 S.P. Clark “
 A. Johnson RI
 G. G. Green “
 J. C. Stone “
 J Russell “
 E. W. Nottage “
 B. Nelson “
 F. P. Kilburn “
 T. Haslan “
 W. H. Hoyt “
 W. L. Carpenter “
 J. Watts “
 C. Hane Mass
 A. Wheeler “
 I.B. Read R.I
 N Cogswell “
 G.I Gardiner “
 A. Wheeler “
 I.B. Read R.I
 N Cogswell “
 G.I Gardiner “

I. Hathaway “
 I. Converse “
 Wm Wirling “
 I. E. York “
 Mr Short NYConn
 Mr Thompson NY
 Mr Seidell “
 R Dunn “
 Mr Tate Conn
 W. L. Judson “
 Mr. Winchel “
 A. Stewart N.Y
 J. Stewart “
 H. B. Platt “
 I. E. Dechyse “
 W Deforest “
 I. Deforest “
 W Crocheron “
 Tyson & 2 Sons “
 Sexton & Son “
 Mr Waters R.I
 Making a total
 of 77 Passengers
 & 8 Cooks &
 Stewards
 Passengers 77
 Officers & Seamen
 11
 Cooks & Stewards 8

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Wednesday May 23rd 1849. Weather Cool. Wind South blowing a good Stiff breese. we dropped Anchor in harbour opposite the City of Valparaiso about 12 M. making the Passage from St. Catherines to this place in 53 days and from New York including 14 days stoppage at St. Catherines in 121 days. Valparaiso lies in Lat 32° 51' South. Long 73° 57' West. We had a beautiful Sail along up the Coast this morning going at the rate of 10 to 12 Miles an hour under a full spread of Canvass. 6 other vessels going in at the same time, giving us a fair trial of our Barks Sailing qualities. And I must say she did her part nobly. if the chase had been of a few hours longer duration I think we would have beat the whole fleet. We had a fair opportunity of viewing the beautiful Mountain Scenery along the Coast, which for grandeur, magnificence and wildness, exceeded anything of the Kind it has been my lot to behold before. and farther back from the Coast range the lofty Andes, raising their bold Peaks and piercing the clouds with their Snow-capt Summits. Constrasting beautifully with the dark foliage of the Mountains



below, the Harbour presented quite an imposing appearance. there were lying

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at anchor upwards of 50 vessels, of all classes. The U.S. Sloop of War Dale just returned from California en route for New York. the news she brought from the Gold Mines was flattering, and confirmed the most exaggerated accounts before given, our hopes in regard to the future prospect of obtaining wealth from the Gold mines in California were strengthened, and we were anxious to resume our voyage as soon as possible. We sent our letters home by the Dale she Sailed on the 26th inst. She takes also the U.S. Minister to Chili who I understand has been recalled. The U.S. Revenue Cutter Ewing Lieut Bartlett Commanding, arrived here a few days previous from New York and bound for California. There was an English Man of War Frigate Asia also an English War Steamer the Gascon I believe is the name. there were several vessels lying here from New York and bound to San Francisco Among them were the Bank Peytona. Ships Florence and Daniel Webster & Brig Mary W. together with Several others from different ports in the States The harbour of Valparaiso is not very extensive



but safe except for Northern Gales for which it lies very much exposed. The Anchorage ground is good. The City contains a population of about 50,000. it was destroyed in 1825 by an Earthquake. it is built principally built upon a Steep Side hill, and can be viewed at a Single glance from where our Ship lies at Anchor, which is about one mile distant from the Shore, it has no Docks, freight &c is conveyed to and from the Shores by means of Launches or Barges. it is a place of considerable trade. The Business is confined principally to the lower Streets. they

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being the only Streets that are navigable for vehicles of any description. the other Streets or more properly speaking lanes or paths are scarcely navigable for pedestrians unless remarkably surefooted. the largest part of the City is built upon ridges, separated from each other by deep ravines. the majority of the dwellings or adobes is constructed of Mud or Sun burnt Bricks and the roofs covered with Tiles or Straw. those in the lower part of the City are more substantially built of Stone or bricks. Merchandise at present is remarkably high, owing partially I suppose to the great increase of trade caused by the




more than usual number of Vessels stopping here for supplies &c bound to California. The following is list of some of the prices. Pork \$35.00 per bbl Flour \$10.00 Butter "inferior" 6p Cheese 1/p Hard coal \$35.00 per ton and everything else in proportion except Horse hire. a good riding horse can be procured for 6p per day. with the promise of returning the Saddle, all the produce and vegetables consumed here are brought in from the interior on Pack Mules or large Carts driven by 6 or 8 Pairs of Oxen. The Country back of the City is high and barren. not a vestage of Wood is discernable. Spring water is scarce and is brought into the City on Pack Mules. The principal fruits exposed for Sale in the Markets are Oranges, Lemons Peaches, Pears, Grapes &c. The Gold Fever rages quite high here as in the States larger numbers of Mechanics and labourers, have left their different occupations and employments and go to the diggings. Carpenters & Masons that are left demand and obtain for their

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Labour from \$3 to \$5.00 per day. the price of Passage from here to San Francisco in Sailing Vessels is \$250.00 Freight is worth \$30.00 per ton, and Vessels are scarce at those rates. To the humble admirer



of Nature and its Scenery those Ports that we have visited in South America present many beautiful prospects, Vegetation abounds almost Spontaneous. The Climate healthy and Salubrious, and the resources for the Sustenance of the Human frame is almost within their own grasp and with a very little exertion. And in viewing the lofty Mountains, Awful Chasms, frightful precipices, and deep ravines, one cannot help but admire the beauties and magnificence of the works of the Almighty. Those lofty Mountains the land marks that have for ages withstood the Storms and Tempests, and gave the bounds to the wild Ocean, show the insignificance of the Works of Man, compared with those of the Creator of the Universe. On the afternoon of the 26th we were busily at work in making preparations to resume our Voyage. the hour for Sailing was 5 PM, but from unavoidable detentions in collecting the Passengers together it was 7 PM before we weighed Anchor. the wind in the meantime had completely left us. An Accident came near befalling us which if happened would probably have reminded us of Valparaiso for Some time to come. in our efforts to beat out the Harbour with a light wind. during the night the Current was




rappidly drawing the Ship upon a ledge of rocks
about 4 AM all hands and passengers were called
up on Deck to save the Ship if possible by
towing her off. she was then within a few
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rods of the rocks, when the water was breaking over
with great violence. 3 boats were lowered and
manned with all possible despatch and com-
-menced the work of towing her off. but in spite of
all our efforts she was still drifting, and was
likely to go Stern on. one of the Boats was despatched
to the English Frigate for assistance, they sent
off 2 Boats well manned to our aid. their timely
relief with a light breeze which, sprang up at
at the time favoured us greatly, and we were
once more beyond the dangerous ledge.


Van Valen Gold Rush Journal Day 130: May, 1849

Thursday May 31st 1849. Clear. no Wind. weather
warm an pleasant. Lat 27° 11' South. Long 80° 35' West.
It is amusing to observe the difference in the dis-
-positions of the passengers in a calm or when we
have a fair wind. In a Sea Voyage a man learns
a great deal, the Ocean has its charms, as well as
its discomfits. and the voyage subject to many changes,
as Storms and Calms, Heat and Cold, which makes
the passage as varied perhaps as a journey upon
the lands. After getting through with the initiatory




preliminaries, such as Sea Sickness and the like, he then begins to relish his food and feel considerably at home in his floating habitation. he must also have what is nautically termed his "Sea legs" on, in order, to more safely navigate the decks, otherwise movement is perilous. and promenading almost impossible, the Ship has their motions in which her planks vary their line of gravitation. with rapid alteration and often with a suddenness which a mere landsman can ill endure. Those of pitching and rocking and lurching. The billows of the Ocean move in successive ranges almost parallel before the driving winds, and seem like the mighty furrows of a fresh ploughed field. It is often that the course of the Ship is transverse or oblique to these. And hence she plunges down gracefully and rises with the same curvature. Splendidly to repeat the action [continued onto page # 62]

immediately, and dash along the ups and downs of her determined way. Behind her a resplendant wake is levelled from her Keel, and boils as it recedes foamy and indignant from her intrusion. Sometimes the wind is light, or fair astern as can be, and in both these cases she rocks us at a sound rate. How one feels as if certainly we



should capsize as she puts down her masts on the Starboard or Larboard as the case may be to an angle of 45 degrees, seemingly, to the plane of the general surface, then recovering she recedes to the opposite extreme, and as regular as the motions of a pendulum, vibrates with portentous sweep from one side to the other, Thus she ploughs the mighty main superiur, and as if instinct with thoughts of the port she has to make, the effects of this is seen and felt through all the interior. The whole Cabin hangs out signals of distress, your trunks, boots, books and other small notions, are all confused, thrown about in topsy-turvey order, and sometimes considerably damaged, till one learns properly to bestow and secure them. Till then indeed it is difficult to walk or stand, to eat and even to Sleep, as one feels in his uneasy berth a nervous propensity to resist the lateral rolling, lest she should go down with him irrecoverably far, although he discovers afterward that his ballancing efforts are all ridiculous and childish, and at length can seem deliciously indeed by the gratuitous rocking. A lurch is very sudden, irregular or extraordinary motion, out of the common shaking routine, which the Ship is want to make at intervals, and which no sagacity can



anticipate, or alertness and practice can
evade. Connected with this is the fine...

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asked how many bells? The Captain seldom
gives orders except to the mates. A Sailor's life
is a dogs life, but now I shudder with a different
perception. a dog's life is far better than theirs.
no ordinary dog suffers as much, is injured at all
so grievously, or is as destitute of apt resources in
times of exposure or want. "his dwelling is the
mountain wave, his home is on the deep." At Sea
they are exposed to all weather, occupied with
toil and painful duty. half clothed and often
with no adequate covering from the Storms they
brave, self-immolated on the altar of duty, A Sailor
seems a kind of an amphibious animal, devoted
to hard service, wet or dry, aloft or on deck, by
night or day, swinging on the Main-top-gallant yard
at midnight, or washing down the decks in the
morning.

Van Valen Gold Rush Journal Day 142: June, 1849

Wednesday June 13th 1849. Clear. light wind from the west, Lat
20° 07' South Long 91° 08' West.

Sounds at Sea

The weary Sea is tranquil, and the breese
Hath sunk to Sleep on its slow heaving breast,
All sounds have passed away, save such as please
The ear of night. who loves that music best,
The din of day would drown the wondrous Song




To whose sweet notes the mingled charms belong
Of Sadness linked to joy. the Breakers Small
(Like pebbled rills) that round the vessels bow
A dreamlike murmur make. the Splash and fall
of waters crisp as rolling calm and slow
She loves alternately her shining sides.
The flap of Sails, that like white garments vast
So idly hang on each gigantic mast.
The regular tread of him whose skill presides
O'er the night-watch, and whose brief fitful words
The ready Helmsman echoes, these low Sounds
are all that break the stillness that surrounds
Our lonely dwelling on the dusky main.
But yet the visionary soul is stirred
While Fancy hears full many a far off Strain
Float o'er the conscious Sea. the scene and hour
Control the Spirit with mysterious power
And wild unutterable thoughts arise
That makes us yearn to pierce the starry skies

Susan Van Valen's Letter

New York June 13th 1849

My Dear Husband


You cannot imagine how happy I was to receive a letter from you. O how anxiously have I watched for it. It was a long time to be separated from my dearest friend and not hear any tidings of you I received your letter on the 9th of this month dated March 24th but have not received the note you send previous to that. I was very happy to hear that you had not been sick since you left, but am sorry to hear that your provision has been so poor. I am afraid that you really suffered for the necessaries of life, and fear you will yet have to encounter many hardships. O if it were so that I could only be with you to prepare your food to share with you your trials and difficulties, I feel as if I would be willing to endure any hardship if I could add to your comfort. Dearest Alex do not imagine for a moment that I charge you with neglect in not returning home on that memorable Sunday in which you left, never shall I forget that day. when you left the house I thought



my heart would break. I felt as if the only friend I had in the world had gone. I tried to hide my feelings from you, that you should not see how unhappy I felt. the children would say to me Ma dont cry Pa will soon come back he has gone to buy gold to buy us a sight of things. when Mr. Tower returned about 11 O Clock he said you had not gone but was expecting to go every moment and did not think the captain would be willing to have you leave the vessel even if you should not get off that day.

I did not hear from you until Kerr returned and said he has seen you off. He gave the Cakes you sent to the Children they said they was California Cakes and that I had given them to you. O how often through that day did I wish that you could come but I did not censure you in the least. You who was always so kind to me, I was one of the happiest beings while blessed with your society O heaven grant that we may yet be spared to enjoy each others society for many years, and never again to be separated while life remains. I feel very lonely without you at times blame myself for not urging you to remain at home, again I feel as if that would not be fulfilling my duty you knew what was for the best....

I have enjoyed excellent health since you left the children have been well with the exception of colds. I moved from Stuyvesant Street the first of May Kerr assisted me in moving I am now living at 45 Perry Street I have a room Bedroom and Kitchen on the second floor at \$75 a year. I have had as much sewing as I could do, have drawn 70 dollars to pay my rent the quarter in Stuyvesany Street and until the first of August where I am now living, as if nothing happens to prevent I intend going to Poughkeepsie this week and then to Albany County and will remain all summer as I think it will be much healthier for the children. there was 36 cases of Cholera yesterday and 11 deaths. The little creatures talk of you every day when I show them your likeness they say that is Pa but I want to see my other Pa. everything you ever told them to do they seem to remember. I do not think they will forget you unless you should again let your beard grow, then I am afraid I would not know you. I dream of you often but I am always in trouble as it seems as if you was Just leaving home, or have



returned without success according to the old saying always take dreams the contrary therefore you will meet with good success. we do not hear much from the gold regions but shall soon expect to hear from you may all that we have heard prove true and may you meet with the success you anticipated....


affectionate wife

Susan M Van Valen

Van Valen Gold Rush Journal Day 199: August, 1849

Wednesday Augt 8th '49. Cloudy and foggy. Wind North West. Saw several Vessels this morning, about 2 P.M. the more than joyfull Sound of "Land ho" was heard which resounded again and again from Stem to Stem till all joined in the welcome chorus "Land ho." The Shores and Golden Mountains of California were directly ahead of us, we approached near the Coast and from observations (&c) we were to the Northward of the entrance to the Harbour, we sailed down the Coast till night when the weather became thick and foggy again, it was deemed imprudent to proceed any farther. and dropt Anchor.

Thursday Augt 9th '49. The Weather was somewhat thick and foggy again this morning. about 6 A M we weighed Anchor again and stood for the Mouth of the Harbour which appeared about 14 Miles distant. The passengers all forgot their daily allowance of Water this morning and the Mate neglected to secure the Scuttle-butt so we had free trade and no monopoly, but the



scenery which the Coast presented to our eager eyes, prevented a too free indulgence of it. we had forgotten our former hardships and privations in anticipation of speedily arriving at the Port of our destination, About 12 M we had the...

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pleasure of seeing the Old Anchor once more descend from the Bows and make sure her fastenings, and the Vessel safely mooved in the Harbour. and in front of the long-looked-for City of San Francisco. My first Business was to repair to the Post Office for Letters. we had been absent from our homes nearly 7 Months and received no tidings from them in the meantimes. I found the Post Office without much difficulty and procured a beautifull supply of Letters for myself and Company. We made the passage from Valparaiso in 74 days, the distance Sailed was 7909 Miles. Whole number of days from New York including stoppages at St. Catherines and Valparaiso 199 days. Whole distance Sailed between New York and San Francisco 20579 Miles. Whole number of Sailing days 181. The passage from the Sea to the Harbour is a narrow channel, about 1 mile wide in the narrowest part, and 5 miles long. The entrance is but a Small gap, abd presents more of the appearance of a narrow Mountain pass. The channel could with a little trouble be strongly fortified, and




made the Gibraltar of America. the Harbour of San Francisco is one of the finest in the World. between the western shore of the Bay of San Francisco and the Sea, is a low range of Mountains on rugged Hills, some of which uprise to the height of Several hundred feet. This Coast range as it is called forms a noble barrier to protect the Bay and Shipping in the Harbour from the strong North West winds that prevail on this Coast. The City of San Francisco is situated on the West shore of the Bay which bears the same name, and at the entrance from the Sea. It is built upon an elevated position and commands a fine view of the Harbour. a long distance up (80) and down the Bay, and also a large portion of the beautifull Slope that skirts the Eastern shore of the Bay. The City is regularly laid out into Streets and Squares. it is yet in its infant State, but few well constructed buildings adorn its beautifull and commanding position in its – rapid growth, and in the absence of a better material, Tents, and Frames covered with Canvass supply the place of more substantial structures for dwellings and Stores. And in taking a view of this unparalleld rapid growing City. the thousands of tons of Shipping swinging idly too



and fro, at their moorings in the Harbour. one cannot help but indulge in wild speculations as to the future developements, of what has allready begun under auspices so favourable for commercial wealth and greatness. and must attain that high and commanding position which is her destiny. The Soil near the Water is a hard clayey substance, farther back it is rich and loamy well adapted for gardening or other purposes. the Water is bad, the most of it being impregnated with an Alkali or mineral substance, and has a Copperish disagreeable taste. The Climate is mild and of an even temperature, the City in summer is cooled by a fine breese which setts in regularly about Noon each day, and continues till Sun down from the North West. during the dry or Summer season, Rains and dews are seldom and of rare occurence. during the Winter Season the prevailing Winds are South East, which bring with it rains and fogs. the North and East Winds which are seldom, are generally Cold and usually accompanied with Squalls of Hail and Snow. The population at present is variously estimated [81] from 10,000 to 30,000. no specific number can be accurately decided upon. the number of permanent residents, to the mighty mass that




are in the City daily, and those who make it their abode for a space of time, before leaving for the Mines, is comparatively small. Building material is scarce, and the price placed it beyond the reach of many. Lumber when we arrived was selling at \$375.00 per [illegible]. Mechanics were scarce and demanded extravagant wages, \$12 or \$16- per day was asked and readily given. the immense cost of Building at present greatly retarded the progress of improvement, although a visible change was observed daily, and the clattering din of the Carpenters hammers & Saw, could be heard amid the bustle of this magic-like scene. Labour of every description, Provisions, Staple Goods &c commanded high prices, and Money, or Gold dust at \$16- per ounce which is, properly speaking the currency of Country, was in abundance, which was equivalent to the exorbitant prices demanded. Gambling is carried on to a great extent in all its different branches. "Monte" the favourite of the Mexicans, is the principal game, large Fortunes have been quickly made at the Mines, and more speedily lost at the gambling table. this is San Francisco which but a short time ago contained but a few old and delapidated spanish dwellings, one which I observed was still standing, it was constructed of Adobes or sun burnt bricks, one story high, the



roof was covered with Tiles, and looked as ancient as old Antiquity itself. The Bay and Harbour has been celebrated, from the time of its first discovery, as one of the finest in the World, and is justly entitled to that character, even under [82]

the Seamans view of a mere Harbour. But when all the accessory advantages which belong to it-fertile and picturesque dependent Country. Mildnes of its climate, connected with the great interiur by the navigable waters of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, which flow into it, and drain the most fertile and beautifull Valley, I suppose in the known world, its valuable Sources for ship timber when all these advantages are taken into the account, with its Geographical position on the line of communication to the great commercial Ports of Asia and the East-Indies It rises to an importance far above that of a meere Harbour, and may justly be considered a valuable acquisition to the United States in a Maritime point of view, from it s close proximity to those great Asiatic ports.

We remained in San Francisco 4 days. the vessel not being ready to discharge her cargo as soon as we wished to proceed to the Mines,




so we took our Tent, some Provisions, a few tools and made preparations to depart, We concluded to go to the mokelem diggings. Daniel P Clark a Brother of one of our company and a discharged Volunteer in Col Stevenson's Regiment, agreed to accompany us to that place he had worked in those mines the proceeding Winter. on the 13th of Augt our preparations being completed we were ready to embark. we engaged passage in a Small launch of about 20 tons, Schooner rigged, for \$14.00 each to Stockton and @ 2 ½ per hund for all freight that exceeded 100 lb to each man. we to provision ourselves on the passage, 12 more of our fellow ship mates [83]

took passage in the same boat with us. We left San Francisco about 12 M the Tide and Wind being fair, we had a delightfull Sail out of the harbour and up the Bays. about 12 Miles from the City we passed the beautifull Island of De los Angelos, (lost Angels) the passage between the Island and the main land is narrow and forms a kind of a Straits which separates the Bay of San Francisco from San Pablo Bay, which extends to the North our course lay across the Southern extremity, about 20 Miles when we entered the Straits of Carquinez and passed into Suisun Bay. near these Straits




are 6 small Islands singularly located in pairs, and called the Father and Mother, the two Brothers and the two Sisters. On the Northern shore of these Straits is situated the town of Benicia, a beautiful and to all appearances a healthy location, and the surrounding Country present fair prospects for the Agriculturists, high arid lands well adapted for grazing, and now covered with Wild Oats, level plains, and beautiful undulating grounds, exhibiting rich and fertile Valleys and sunny exposures, from its fine location and easy access to the Sea. this place must rise to importance in the destinies of California. the Shores are bold and sufficient depth of Water to float the largest class of Vessels, Ships of 600 tons can lie along side of the bank and discharge her cargo. it is the opinion of some that here will be the Navy Yard in California. Government has already established a Military Post here. at present there is quite a detachment of Dragoon quartered at this point. The Country bordering on these Bays' presents smooth low ridges and rounded [84] Hills. clothed with Wild Oats and more or less openly wooded on their Summits, it assumes though in a State of Nature, a beautiful and Cultivated



appearance. Wild Oats cover it in continuous fields and herds of Wild Cattle are scattered over low Hills, and partly isolated ridges, and terminating into more abruptly broken hills or Mountains Myriads of Wild Geese, Ducks, Pelicans, Cranes, and numerous other species of Water Fowl, infest the Shores and waters of the Bays, Otter & Seal are quite numerous also. The Waters abound in the most excellent varieties of Fish, such as Salmon, Trout and the like, and on the Marshes bordering on the Bays, are innumerable flocks of Curlews and Mud Hen an excellent game bird.


We came to an Anchor at dark in Suisun Bay, the Wind was blowing fresh and cool from the North and we were compelled to lie on the open decks of the Boat, with only our Blankets to shelter us, which we had sparingly provided ourselves with and thus we passed a verry uncomfortable night. We resumed our passage again at daylight and about Sunrise entered the Mouth of the San Joaquin (San Manto) River. this river and the Sacramento both enter the Bay at the same place, one from the South the other from the North, at the mouth of the San Joaquin River is situated the town of "New York on the Pacific" it is called. Col Stevenson of the New York Volunteers figured largely in bringing this place in existence at present it consists of our House nearly completed



two others in contemplation, and a Flag Staff with the American colour flying in all that denotes the place of this "Gotham" in embryo. its location is low and backed by level and extensive plains Vessels of all classes can lie along side of the Bay...

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The San Joaquin River at its mouth varies from an 1/8 to a mile in width, the banks are low and marshy, and covered with a luxuriant growth of Tules, which grow to the height of 10 or 12 feet, which deprives the traveller from viewing the scenery beyond them. The adjacent Country is level, and numerous Sloughs branch off from the River, some of which are as large as the main stream rendering the navigation rather difficult to those unacquainted with them. We had the misfortune to run in to one of them the Captain discovered his mistake in a few hours, we tied our launch up to the Tules at night. the next day Augt 15th We arrived at Stockton, which is the principal trading post for the Southern Mines, it is a place of considerable size and importance as the great trading Depot for the Southern Mines. as present it is like all other cities we have seen in California




a city of Tents, but few wooden structures
grace its beautiful location.

Day 414- Letter to Susan March 1850

...I can now see that I have done wrong. I ought to have remained at home, and endeavoured to fulfil my pledge to love, cherish And protect. I know that I have erred, and hope you will pardon my misconduct and neglect, and may I never, (if permitted to return once more), be induced to follow the golden bubble again. at the time I thought I was doing for the best, prompted by the hopes of realizing a speedy Fortune, blinded by the dazzling prospects of obtaining a little Gold, slighted her who it was my duty not to neglect and whom it was my good fortune to be connected with, though undeserving mortal as I am, if you can pardon me this time, I shall feel gratefull, and if it should ever be my lot, to visit a distant country again in hopes of bettering our condition in life, may we be united in the enterprise, and perhaps success will follow the undertaking, if not we can at any rate enjoy the pleasures of each others society.

Our Summer Campaign for digging is already marked out. A Company of 17 has been formed to turn the River again this season a short distance below where we turned it last Season. they consist of Isaac Cornells party 6 in number Reynolds & Sawyer, passengers in the same ship with us, and who have been with us all the time we have been at the Mines, W.H. Van Siclen, and 5 Gentlemen from Illinois who have been our nearest neighbors this winter, and a finer sett of men you never saw. And 3 of us which makes the number 17. Our Company now is reduced to 3. Clark left us in January & Paulison in October, Wm H Van Siclen has boarded with us since October last, he paid us \$10 a week for Board untill Jany 1st and then we raised it to \$14 a week-on the first of March he left us and joined Reynolds & Sawyer and have gone to Murphys new diggings about 25 Miles south from here to sett up and Eating House, untill we go at the River which will be the middle of June. I think that they will do well with a business of that kind. I think it is better than Gold digging. I suppose all of you believe what you see printed in the papers,



and of large Fortunes obtained in a few days, and large lumps being found, as being all true. It was reported that a 94 pound lump was found at Murphys diggings. I have been in the place and saw the persons who have seen it. One man says that there was about 2 ounces of Gold in it and that the rest was white Quartz Stone. about the large Fortune Mr Higgins got that you speak of in your letter we have heard nothing about. where there is one man that gets a pile or has good luck in a place, there are thousands who do not earn a living. it is only the extreme cases that are published they are much exaggerated. We have got now on hand about 8 pounds, and we have done better than the average. Cornells party have done better than we have during the Winter. Mat is our Capt now and he feels proud of the Office, but it ammounts to nothing...

at present I think I shall start for home by the 1st of Dec or Jany next. I do not intend to remain another Winter in California alone at all events. Kiss the Children for me, and tell them not to forget me, and give yourself a good hug on my account. I wish I could do it myself ---

From your Affectionate Husband


Alex Van Valen

The California Mutual Gold Mining Company, 1848 – Miner's Agreement

We the undersigned, Alexander Van Valen, Mathew Van Sicklen, Stephen P. Clark, William Byxbee, and Richard I. Paulisen, of the City of New York, Severally and conjointly do hereby agree for and in consideration of the Sum of Twenty five Hundred Dollars, advanced by Mesrs Henry A. Kerr and B.S. Clark, to agree to the following terms ---

First To proceed from the Port of New York on or about the first day of January Eighteen Hundred and forty nine, to the port of San Francisco in upper California, and from thence to proceed to the Gold District without unnecessary delay, and employ our time to the best advantage gathering Gold, and there to remain through two Mining or Summer Seasons-

[Second Omitted]



Third That the above mentioned Sum of Twenty five Hundred Dollars, is to be appropriated in the following maner. Two Thousand Dollars for Passage, Provisions, Mining Tools &c, the Ballance Five Hundred Dollars to be retained in the hands of the Treasurer to pay all necessary expences in California-

Fourth All expences incurred, after the expenditure of the above mentioned Five Hundred Dollars are to be paid out of the earnings in California. It is hereby Mutually agreed between the Parties that Alexander Van Valen shall be the Treasurer and Correspondent of the Company

[Fifth omitted]

Sixth We hereby agree and bind ourselves, to remain with this Party through Sickness adversity and prosperity, Mutually to protect and defend each other, untill our return to New York-

Seventh We bind ourselves in no case to desert the within named Party, if any of the Party Should desert before any quantity of Gold is collected, the Party so deserting, shall forfeit the Sum of Five Hundred Dollars, to be recovered from them by a Suit at Law, by Mesrs. Kerr & Clark. And in case that any of the Party should desert after having obtained a quantity of Gold, We hereby agree to forfeit all right, title, and interest, in any of the Property of this expedition And likewise in case any of the Party, desert after signing this Article of agreement before reaching California, they the Party so deserting shall forfeit the sum of Five Hundred Dollars.

Eight It is also mutually agreed that after defraying the expences, We the five undersigned persons are to receive on our return to the City of New York, Three Quarters of all the nett proceeds, of all our earnings during this expedition the Ballance, One Quarter, to be the property of Mesrs Kerr & Clarke-

[Ninth omitted]

Tenth We the undersigned five Persons do hereby bind ourselves to pay five per cent of our Share of the nett proceeds, of this expedition, to the legal executors or assigns, of any or either of the Party who may die after we shall have Sailed from the Port of New York. Said five percent to be paid out of our Share of the nett proceeds after the Death of any or either of us The above percentage to be paid after the close or

immediately after the amount of each Share is determined.

[Eleventh omitted]

Given under our hands and Seals this Twentieth day of
December One Thousand Eight Hundred & forty Eight.

Witnessed by

Gen H Clark

E. J. Hyde

Alexander Van Valen

Mathew Van Siclen

Stephen P Clark

William Byxbee

Richard I Paulison