

How I Found My Wife.

A Narrative¹

By Bethuel G. Handy of Cotuit, Mass.

Some years ago a rosy cheeked boy about sixteen years of age came to my uncle's vessel² at Albany and asked for a chance to work his passage to Boston. He said he was an English boy, that his father had come to this country a few years ago, leaving his mother behind with a large family of boys; that a little time ago his father had sent for him to come and join him at a town a little way from there; that he had arrived a short time previous but could not find his father, but he heard there that his father had gone to Boston, and he wished to try to find him there.

The Captain³ took pity on him and took him aboard, to make himself as useful as he could, for his passage. On the way to Boston the vessel stopped at a small town where the Captain resided. He took the boy ashore with him and introduced him to my grandfather⁴. The old man took an interest in the boy and told him that if he did not find his father in Boston to come back and live with him and go to school; that his boys were all grown up, and that he liked to have a boy to help him around the farm, and that he might hear of his father some day. The boy went to Boston in the vessel but got no tidings of his father so returned to my grandfather's to accept his offer to be his boy for the present.

It being the fall of the year and the winter term of school commencing he went to school, and but little being done around the place, all he was asked to do was to cut a little firewood and bring it in nights and mornings before and after school. Coal had not got much in use up to that time, so it required much wood to be cut.

When the winter term of school was over and the time for vessels to begin their summer work, most of the winter school boys, being sailors, got ready to join the vessels. This boy, which, I will for the present call John, thought he would be a sailor for the summer also, and joined one of the vessels of the place, and after passing the summer as a sailor, returned to my grandfather's to pass the winter and go to school again and so continued to do until the fall of 1848, when an uncle of mine⁵, who was about to sail on a whaling voyage to the Pacific Ocean took a liking to John and persuaded him to go on the voyage with him. The same day they started to join the ship (accompanied by my uncle's wife and family, which were to go on the voyage with him), I sailed from home on a winter's voyage to the Gulf of Mexico coasting.

¹ This transcription by James G. Russell in February 2020 is of a typed version which I found in an envelope mailed in February 1951 from Marion C. Smith to her brother Clarence Gifford Smith (my grandfather). I am sure Marion typed the 1951 version since she typed a number of other historical documents. I have fixed a few obvious typos, but otherwise left the text as previously transcribed. The original would have been written sometime prior to Bethuel's death in 1903, so he is describing his memory of events from about 50 years earlier.

² Roland T. Nickerson was first mate of the schooner Highlander per the Reminiscences of Captain Thomas Chatfield

³ Aaron Nickerson, per Reminiscences.

⁴ Seth Nickerson (1799-1865). Not to be confused with his son Seth Nickerson (1814-1892)

⁵ Seth Nickerson (1814-1892)

We coasted between New Orleans and Savannah all winter, and towards spring the news came to me that many men had started from our place (as well as from most or all other places) for California, where rich gold mines had been discovered, and when we arrived home in May, 1849, the news had arrived that my uncle had put in at Collao, Peru⁶, and had broken up his whaling voyage to take a company of men to California, for which he was to be paid a big price.

I continued coasting from Boston to Albany, as mate of a vessel, until the later part of the summer. In the meantime exciting news was continually arriving of the great fortunes that were being made in the California mines, and I joined a company that was making up at our town to take a schooner, load her with everything that was expected would sell at a great profit, mostly building material, to go around Cape Horn to California. After being several weeks loading the vessel to her greatest capacity, to be sure that no room was wasted, the middle of September⁷ we were ready to start, and bidding good-bye to our friends, one kind old man said that the only pity was that our vessel was not a bigger one to hold more gold, (she carried 250 tons.)

Our passage for Cape Horn was uneventful, only that when crossing the equator some of the older sailors set out to play Neptune, and probably the game would have gone off well, if he had not set out to shave the youngest man on board, the Captain's nephew, which riled up the captain so that he came after old Nep with a club and rushed him over the bow, not however without the remark that he would know better than to come on board a schooner again, but he would fix him if he ever caught him on a square-rigger again. The fun of it was that no one on board but the Captain and mate had ever crossed the equator before, there were sixteen men on board all told, eight of crew and eight passengers.

We encountered the usual southwest gales off Cape Horn, where it has always been supposed that a schooner had but living⁸. We weathered the storm well and in part beat some of the ships that we sighted.

We visited the port of St. Corlas, on the island of Chilea⁹, on our way up the coast of Chili¹⁰, where we spent three days. It is a lovely place, and everything was green and beautiful, it being springtime there, so that strawberries were at their height, of superior quality, as big as small hen's eggs. It was there that we missed our opportunity. They had very superior potatoes there, very red on the outside, and quite red all through and very mealy. We bought all we had room for, about a hundred barrels, a part of which we sold in San Francisco, for 35 cents a pound. If we had hove our cargo overboard, and loaded up with potatoes, we would have made a good speculation. We could have sold our building material there, but it was not worth taking out of the vessel when we arrived in San Francisco the middle of March.¹¹

⁶ Marion had Colea, Chili, which is an error. Per the Reminiscences of Captain Thomas Chatfield, the uncle's ship put in at Callao, which is the main port of Peru and is near Lima.

⁷ 1849

⁸ Sic

⁹ Most likely Chiloe, which was a center for foreign whalers in the 19th Century, especially French whalers. The two main ports are Castro and Ancud. [Wikipedia article on History of Chiloe]

¹⁰ Chile

¹¹ 1850

As we were entering the Golden Gate, our passengers all having spy glasses, reported everything they saw as looking yellow like gold, but they had not been on shore many moments when the surroundings did not look so yellow.

San Francisco was then but a round hill with but here and there a light frame house, mostly underpinned with tobacco boxes. Canvas tents predominated. The best buildings were gambling houses that were kept open day and night, gold and silver coins piled high on the tables, which were continuously surrounded by men with pistols and long pistols belted to their sides, making bets and most often losing, and often at the last, when all their money was gone, in desperation, thinking they had been cheated, would make a grab at the specie on the table and in trying to get away with it would be shot down.

The post-office was a single story frame building with no boxes, so that the mails were given out from four general deliveries, and for the first twelve hours after the arrival of a steamer with the mail the four ranks for the deliveries would extend a mile or more, so that it was an all day job even if one commenced in the morning and then did not get the mail.¹²

As we all landed on the only wharf of the port (and that a small one), we were asked if we would go to work at a dollar an hour lightering goods on shore from the ships in the harbor.

There was no wharf that a ship could go to be lightered. We had no thought of stopping there. We were bound for the mines to make our fortunes. After having got our mail and spent three days there, we took on several more passengers and sailed for Sacramento; we were three days getting there; then were commissioned with our company.

I will here explain that the eight of the crew were banded together under the Captain and the Mate, all owning an equal part of one half of the cargo, the owners the other half. We were to share the profits according to our rank: the Captain the most, the Mate next and the rest of us equal. It was agreed that, on our arrival in Sacramento if the Captain and Mate agreed on what it was best to do, we were to do it their way, but if they did not agree, a vote was to be taken on the two ways proposed by all the crew and we were to do the way the majority decided, and they did not agree, so the majority said we would go in the mines, leaving Captain and cook to keep ship and keep the cargo on board, hoping it might raise in price after a while.

We soon got ready and started, under the control of the Mate for Georgetown¹³, shipping our tools and some provisions by an ox team. After a four days journey of sixty miles, we arrived at our destination, but the road was a hard one and the new trade that we were to begin, looked to be a much harder one than we expected. Instead of being able to shovel up the dust and work the gold right out of it, we found that first we had to shovel from 4 to 6 feet of soil off to get to the gravel bed, averaging from one to three feet, that lay on the bed rock, which contained the gold,

¹² At this time letters were only delivered to post offices, where they had to be picked up, and not to individual addresses.

¹³ Georgetown was the northeastern-most town in the California Mother Lode, and was a major mining center. [Wikipedia article on Georgetown] Marion's 1951 transcription shows that she had trouble reading the place name, and guessed "Georges Town or Ford". By modern roads (mostly I-80), Georgetown is about 50 miles northeast of Sacramento.

when there was any, but very often there would be none after all that shoveling and washing of the gravel.

The weather was very nice all the time, and although it was very warm days, the nights were just warm enough to sleep good rolled in blankets in the tents. We were camped on one of the high ridges that ran down to the North Fork of the American River¹⁴ but we found the gold in the bottom of the canyon (so called), the deep gulches between the ridges¹⁵, some four or five hundred feet deep and very steep to climb up and down.

Here we stopped about three months, only having dug but little more gold than would have paid for our tools and provisions, which had been supplied us from the vessel, except the fresh meat which we bought from time to time.

The ground in this vicinity having been dug over where there was any sign of gold, it was necessary for some of us to go prospecting for other diggings. Two, besides myself, volunteered to go. After buying a mule to carry our tools, we started for more southern mines. We passed by many places where miners were at work, but could find no favorable place to stop, all complaining of poor diggings, until the end of the second day we arrived at the big bend of the [] River¹⁶, where we found many men at work and doing very well and among them the cook of our schooner at work by himself, contrary to rules. The Captain had permitted him to go by himself, giving all the rights and the same privileges, so we disputed the Mate's right to rule us any more. However we returned to the rest of our company at Georgetown and made known our discovery, divided what gold we had saved, bought another mule and started for the []¹⁷ with the mutual agreement to work together, but to divide the gold weekly. We struck on quite good diggings that continued about two months, then it being nearly time for the rainy season to set in, we thought we would look for no other but go down to the vessel and see what we could do about getting a settlement with the captain. Our case was put in the hands of a lawyer who passed a settlement.

Cholera was very thick at Sacramento, people dying every day.

Although our vessel was laying on the opposite side of the river, from the city, and we kept away from the city most altogether, one of the townsmen that was visiting us was attacked with the disease but with much care and attention we got him improving. [] and the affairs being settled, five men set out for San Francisco, where three of the number shipped aboard a ship for

¹⁴ Georgetown is actually a bit south of the Middle Fork of the American River, so if they were camped on the North Fork, they were likely a few miles northwest of Georgetown.

¹⁵ Canyon is a word of Spanish origin, and obviously was new to Bethuel when he reached California.

¹⁶ Marion could not read the original and guessed "Lecansag" River, but I can find no such river or similarly named river. Moving south from Georgetown, they may have gone to the South Fork of the American River, which was a major mining zone and which does have a large bend.

¹⁷ Marion could not read the original and guessed "Miconsia or Ancornia", but I can find no such places. Note that it took them 4 days to go 60 miles when they had a definite destination in mind. They spent 2 days searching for new diggings, and so would not have gone more than 20-30 miles from their original diggings.

home, by way of Chincha Island¹⁸. While there one of them, my brother-in-law, was drowned.¹⁹ Another with me shipped on a schooner to go to the Sandwich²⁰ Islands for a load of potatoes. On our arrival at Maui²¹ I got the news that my uncle, that had left San Francisco just a short time before we arrived there in the spring, had been to the Arctic Ocean whaling, had filled his ship with oils and on his way home had left Maui²² but three days before we arrived, and that the boy John (the one of the original crew) had gone home with him, that Uncle, Aunt and all their family were well and so forth. I was sorry to be sure, that we had not arrived in time for me to have seen them. We were about three weeks getting our potatoes on board. When we were about to start back for San Francisco, my shipmate was taken sick and had to be left in the hospital, but he asked me to wait in San Francisco until I should hear from him as we had planned to go into the mines together again. We went to Sacramento to dispose of the potatoes and one day, when we had got nearly discharged, a young man came aboard and inquired where the vessel was going from there, and when I told him I expected to the Sandwich Islands he wondered if he could get passage on her. I told him I thought he could. I inquired what he wished to go there for and he said to go whaling. I told him I thought he could do better to go to the mines. He said he had just come from the mines and wanted no more of them, that he and a shipmate had been in the mines for days. Of course, I laughed. He had left his shipmate up street and left me to find him, but he soon returned accompanied by his friend. Very soon the captain came aboard so they got the promise of a passage to San Francisco, at least, and to the islands if the vessel went.

After dinner they turned to, to help us discharge potatoes and at times having a little leisure we passed the time in conversation. They told me they were in the ship Massachusetts last season, that one of them was third mate, the other the cooper. That being my uncle's ship I thought I would keep dark and find out how the voyage had gone. After they had given very flattering accounts of my uncle, his wife and family and the boy John and had expressed many regrets that they had not gone home in the ship, I told them that I was an old acquaintance and they had much more to ask and tell me. The next day we started down the river and being four days on the way we had much time for conversation. One day the cooper inquired if I knew where the boy John belonged and what his name was. I told them what John's story had always been since I had known him, that his name was John Thomas and that he belonged in England, and that the last he knew all but his father were in England. Yet, said the cooper, that was not his right name, that he belonged in New York state, where his father, mother, and a lot of brothers and a sister were living not long ago. I remarked that it did not concern me as it was not likely he would ever court one of my sisters.

When we arrived at San Francisco they found the schooner was not likely to go to the islands, very soon, at least, so they shipped to another vessel that was found there and they persuaded me

¹⁸ The Chincha Islands are three small islands offshore Peru, which it this time had extensive guano deposits.
[Wikipedia article on Chincha Islands]

¹⁹ This would have been his sister Eliza's husband, Charles Grafton Phinney who died April 7, 1851 per
FamilySearch.org.

²⁰ Hawaiian

²¹ Marion could not read the original and guessed "?Maria or Marise". Maui is most likely since Lahaina, Maui was a major whaling port at this time

²² Ditto

hard to go a whaling with them, but although I had become very much attached to them, I was bent on trying my fortune again in the mines. I went to a boarding house to await news from my shipmate. There I met with a young sailor, that was working along shore, that persuaded me to join him and a gang of sailors to go aboard of a big ship in the harbor, to get her underway and to work her into the wharf where she was to be discharged of a general cargo. There were no tugboats to do such work as there is now. They had got a few wharves built there that a ship could go to. After much trouble the ship was got to the wharf. Then we agreed to stay by and discharge the ship at four dollars a day, and board on the ship, which we did until we broke down into the cargo where there was a lot of champagne, that the men made so free with that they all got discharged. I did not make any use of it so the captain and the mate tried to get me to stay by and they offered me larger wages but I concluded to get out of the champagne business and took to the boarding house again.

Soon after that a big fire broke out and burned about half of the city, which had then grown to be quite a large and substantial city with many brick and iron buildings. That is what is commonly called the big San Francisco fire²³, and although it prostrated all other business for a while, it caused good times for all working men, particularly all such as had ability for carpentering. As I had a little ability that way I offered my services and was accepted at one dollar an hour for a few days, but wages soon fell to half a dollar an hour, so then I gave up the trade, determined to go in the mines very soon.

When I was about to start my shipmate arrived. Then he heard that his brother had lately arrived and when he found him, he wanted to go to the mines with us. After a little more delay, we started by way of Sacramento City, where we bought two mules, packed them with tools and provisions that we were mining last on the [] River²⁴ but we found the grounds so badly worked over that we thought we would prospect farther. After three weeks traveling and trying the ground in different places, not having much money left, we settled down not far from where we started three weeks before. Although the prospect was not big at first, it soon got better, and we continued there for three months until the rainy season was so near that it was time to build a log cabin and prepare for it. First we made up our minds to have a week or two vacation to go to the city, to get letters from home, send home some gold and return for the winter.

At the city I got letters²⁵ and one from my oldest sister²⁶ told me of the arrival home of my uncle with his family, all well, and that John Thomas had grown into a nice young man and that he was very attentive to our young sister²⁷, that uncle was soon going on another voyage and that John Thomas was going with him as second mate. She hoped that I would come home again by the time that they got home again, for no doubt there would be a wedding at our house. All this news after what I had heard about John set me to thinking what I had best do about it. It was

²³ The fire took place May 3-4, 1851. [Wikipedia article on San Francisco Fire of 1851]

²⁴ Marion could not decipher the text and guessed "Mecessey or Meconsney" River. Possibly the correct river was the Mokelumne, which a major gold-producing stream.

²⁵ The Daily Alta California issue of 17 Aug. 1851 includes Bethuel in the long list of people with letters at the San Francisco Post Office. He may have been on other lists, but if so I have not found them in the California Digital Newspaper Collection.

²⁶ Elisa Harvey Handy (1831-1916)

²⁷ Florentine Handy (1834-1918). If this is 1851, she would have been 17 years old.

very evident that John was a deceiver and I wondered whether or not he might be an innocent deceiver. Either way that it might be, I felt it was my duty to my sister to find out how it was before it was too late, but how to do it was my inquiry. I resolved that I would not write a word about what I had heard and was very glad that I had not already done so, as I had thought several times of doing. I made up my mind that I would go home by another fall, as my uncle would likely get home by the next spring, and in case they did not get home before I wished to go away again, I could make known what I had heard and they could be governed accordingly.

When we got back to the mine we built a nice log cabin, then went to work in our diggings again. Two young men came that way prospecting one day and made up their minds to go to work nearby us, built themselves a cabin and went to work. I found them to be very agreeable company although they were farmers. I enjoyed their company all the more as they seemed to enjoy mine because I was a sailor. We were having good weather for working yet and we improved it as we knew the time was not far off when it would be raining most of the time. One day an old and a young man came prospecting that way. They could find no prospect to encourage them to stay there and the old man concluded to go to the city, but the young man thought he would prospect further. I took a liking to him and proposed that he go to work with us and live with us but my partners were not willing. I thought it was very unkind of them considering I had furnished the means with which to come to the mines at first and had sent them money since, which they still owed me. Although they said they would never pay me if I left them, I left them all the quicker.

The young man, whose name was Hammond and I fitted up an old deserted cabin near where the other two were living, bought a few tools and went prospecting by ourselves. We had been living in our quarters but a few days when one night, as we were asleep on our bed made of small pine boughs laid on big bushes, to keep us off the ground, Hammond woke up to find the roof of our cabin all on fire over our heads. He was an excitable fellow and he yelled at the top of his voice which awoke me just enough to see the trouble and see him grab the water pail and run outside, which set me to laughing so that I could not get up and in a second the pail of water came smashing down upon me with a lot of firebrands, which made me laugh all the harder and as I was all wet I lay still and covered my head with my blanket until he brought three or four pails of water and got the fire all out. Then he began to wonder what had become of me and he hollered but hearing nothing from me, he came inside of the roofless cabin where he found me rolled up in my blanket, as wet as could be. It was his turn to laugh now and I had another laugh with him. We had left a good fire burning when we went to sleep and the chimney of wood and mud had taken fire and gone to the roof. We made a fire outside, wrung the water out of our blankets, rolled up in them and slept till morning. After we got our breakfast we turned to and repaired the damage, which took us all day.

Very soon after this it commenced to rain, so that most of the time for the next three months we did little besides cook, eat, and play cards. With four young men, in one or the other of our two cabins, we sat every night, telling stories, or playing cards and only got out to dig or hunt a little between showers. Game such as rabbits, hare and quail, was very plentiful so we kept well supplied with fresh meat and only had to go about a mile for our groceries. During the rainy part of the year, winter, we dug but little gold, about enough to pay for our groceries.

As it drew towards spring²⁸ we concluded to look for better diggings. We left everything behind, but each with a change of our best clothes bundled with our blankets, and started for Trinity County by way of Sacramento City, where we took a small steamer up the river to the head of navigation, some twenty miles below (?) Charter City. From there we took a stage to (?) Chostes intending to cross the mountains to Weaverville, as soon as the snow would permit.²⁹

When we got to (?) Chostes City, we found no mule trains were to go over the mountains for two weeks or more. We went to a boarding house and passed the time prospecting when the weather was good, the rest of the time playing cards or watching the gamblers.

At the end of two weeks, not having spent all our money yet, we started with the first mule train for Weaverville. It was but one day's travel and most of the way, it was said, we traveled over forty feet of snow so packed and crusted that it seemed as though we were on hard ground. The most of the way we had to travel on the side of steep mountains and occasionally a mule would lose his footing and roll over and over down the side of the mountain some hundreds of feet, before they would fetch up before a rock or a tree to allow them to gain their footing. The heavy packs of goods on their backs made it very troublesome to travel and the drivers would have to follow and help them up when they stumbled.

Weaverville was composed of a few log cabins and the people were quite in distress for groceries. When we arrived there had been no supplies brought in for four months. Good diggings were discovered there the summer before and miners had crowded in beyond the necessary supply of provisions.³⁰ Snow was deep and the streams flooded. Indians were plenty and troublesome. No one dared to go a mile out of the village. We took what they called a boarding house, a large sized log cabin with two tiers of berths around the sides, all but on one end which was occupied with the common fireplace, with the common wood and clay chimney. The fare consisted of beef, either fried or boiled, bread and potatoes, coffee and tea, for which we had to pay two dollars a day, with the privilege of rolling into one of the bunks with boards for mattresses.

We tried to prospect around the village ravines, where there had been some digging done, but there was too much water to do much. Hammond found an acquaintance in the baking business, that he went to work with.

We were told that there were plenty of good diggings on the North Fork of Weaver Creek, but the miners all got afraid of the Indians and left there.

In the fall we made up our minds to go over there and look at it at least. It was about two miles over a mountain from the village. We made a little prospect and found it quite rich, so we agreed to get tools, a tent and provisions, and make axes and go to work, Indians or no. We logged up

²⁸ 1852

²⁹ The basic outline of their travel is clear but not the details. They would have taken the Sacramento River north to Redding and then gone by trail west over the mountains to Weaverville, which was a major mining center. "Charter City" and "Chostes" seem to be transcription errors. The mining town of Shasta was on the likely route from Redding to Weaverville.

³⁰ Gold was found near Weaverville in 1850. [Wikipedia article on Weaverville]

the sides of our tent so they could not shoot arrows into us whilst we slept. We worked days right along. The people in the village thought us very foolish but we did not have many fears. Saturday we went to the village and we found the people all astir. A man, a herdster, had just been brought in horribly murdered, by Indians, whilst driving some cattle over the mountain for beef, and the Indians had driven off the cattle. Volunteers were being called for to hunt the Indians. No one was wanted that would not agree to kill men, women, and children, so we were rejected. A body of fifty men was soon raised, all armed with two six-shooting pistols and a revolving rifle. All were on horseback.³¹

They tracked the Indians three days by the tracks of the cattle they were driving away with them. When they found they were getting so near them that they dare not travel any more by day, for fear of being discovered, then they waited until dark, when on a trail that could be followed by night. They trusted that the Indians might have kept that trail and started on in pursuit. They had gone about two miles when they discovered a glare of light from the Indians' campfire. Then they left their horses picketed out to feed, in the care of one man, and the rest walked on slowly and guarded until they could see, from a hill, fire at the bottom of a deep hollow, with the wigwams all around. The Indians probably chose this kind of a spot to hide their camp fire in case they were pursued. The men cautiously surrounded the hollow at little distance from each other and lay down to wait until sunlight, so they could shoot them as they showed themselves. The men knew the customs of the Indians; That the chief would rise and give a call for the rest. One of the men was a son of the man that was killed by the Indians, and he got the consent of the captain of the company to let him crawl down to the chief's wigwam, so he could shoot him as soon as he rose and gave the call to the rest, which was done to the letter. As soon as the chief's call and the report of the gun was heard, the Indians, men, women and children, came out of their wigwams and rushed away up the hill to try and get away but they were shot down as fast as they came in sight, until all had disappeared. It was thought that no one escaped. Then they were all hauled together and, as they were gathering some of the dead wood to pile upon them to burn

³¹ This may refer to the death of a butcher named Anderson as reported in the Daily Alta California on 27 April 1852:

MORE INDIAN DIFFICULTIES. The quarrels and disturbances which have so frequently occurred, of late, in the Trinity and Shasta district, are beginning to assume a serious aspect. A number of outrages have been committed by the Indians, and the whites are preparing to unite in a war against them. The Shasta Courier, of Saturday, publishes the following information from Trinity mines and Weaverville: George Butler and Jacob Turner, with two other men, started up Winter Creek, about eight miles from Weaverville, on a prospecting trip. The party took with them only ten days provisions, and have been absent five weeks. It is supposed that the whole party has been killed by the Indians. Mr. Anderson, a butcher in Weaverville, was killed by the Indians, on the 16th inst. Mr. Anderson was driving six cattle, about five miles from Weaverville and had two dogs with him. The cattle and dogs were all taken by the Indians. The body of the deceased was found on Monday last, and had been pierced by nine arrows. His throat was also cut.

A man, with whose name we are unfurnished, was wounded in the arm, on Monday last, by the Indians, near the upper ferry of Trinity river. On Wednesday a Spaniard was killed by the Indians, between Vary's Ranch and Trinity Ferry. James Faulds, who was wounded last week about forty miles from this place, while on his way to Yreka, as stated in our last issue, has since died. In consequence of these outrages, the citizens of Trinity are forming themselves into companies for the purpose of giving the Indians of that section such chastisement as they merit. Two companies, we understand, have already been organized."

A mass meeting of the citizens of Shasta county was called, and was to have been held on Saturday evening, to devise means of protecting life and property against the Indians.

them, they found one young girl and a boy that had hid behind some of the dead trees that were fallen with old age.

We, that were digging in our claim, were the first to get the news. We were alarmed one day, about noon, by much yelling high up on the western mountain side, which we first took to be Indians. We always had our firearms near our work. We jumped out of the pit and took to our arms, determined that we would stand or fall at our ground, knowing there was no use running, for the Indians were very fast runners. As we watched for their appearance we thought of the men that were out hunting the Indians, which we made them out to be, as soon as they came in sight. They came to us and told their story, and to prove that that part of their story at least was true, each man had a part of an Indian's scalp tied to his overcoat, by the long hair. Two of the riders had the Indian boy and girl on their horses' backs, behind them. Poor things, they looked very pitiful, as well they might, when they had just seen all their friends shot down and burned. The men said their captain had ordered the girl and boy shot when found but they had refused to obey orders, and more than that had threatened to shoot the captain, if he shot them.

When they got to the village they were given over to the authorities which gave them over to a settler that had his wife there, and had no children. They were well cared for, and the lady taught them the English language and they became pets of all the village people.³²

Soon after this occurrence, another dead man was brought in, that was found by a party of packers on the trail from (?) Choster City.³³ He had a shotgun bullet hole through his head, so

³² Retaliation for the murder of Mr. Anderson was described in the Daily Alta California on 4 May 1852 and is in general consistent with Bethuel's recollection. The term "Rancheria" means a small native settlement.

TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION ! ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY INDIANS SLAUGHTERED! !

The Shasta Courier of Saturday last, contains a correspondence from Weaversville, Trinity Co., which recounts the particulars of a fearful act of slaughter recently committed in that district. A rancheria of 180 Indians, including women and children, was attacked, and nearly the whole number destroyed. It appears that the Indians of that vicinity have for many months displayed uncompromising hostility towards the whites, and several murders and robberies have been daringly perpetrated. About the 15th ultimo, a Mr. Anderson, who was much esteemed in the vicinity of Weaverville, was missed, and a search being made his mutilated remains were found about six miles from that place, where he had been attacked by Indians, his cattle driven off, and himself cruelly murdered and robbed. A party of thirty-six armed men, under Sheriff Dixon pursued the murderers, and came up with them on the South Fork of the Trinity. The scene that followed is thus described— On Thursday afternoon, the 22d, the scouts discovered the rancheria in a small valley at the base of three mountains on the South side of the South Fork of Trinity River. At midnight the company started from their encampment, Captain Dixon having divided his force into three parties, so as to come upon the Indians from different quarters and surround them. When the day broke, all parties were in the desired positions, and on the signal being given the attack commenced. Each rifle marked its victim with unerring precision — the pistol and the knife completed the work of destruction and revenge, and in a few brief moments all was over. Of the one hundred and fifty Indians that constituted the rancheria only two or three escaped, and these were supposed to be dangerously wounded; so that probably not one of those engaged in the murder of the unfortunate Anderson now remains alive. Men, women and children all shared the same fate — none were spared except one woman and two children, who were brought back prisoners." In palliation of the slaughter of the women and children it is stated that the Indians thrust them forward in a screen for themselves, and behind their persons, as from a barricade, kept up a fire upon their assailants. The party reached Weaverville in safety a few days after the massacre.

³³ Shasta?

that murder was not tagged to the Indians, for they were not known to have any firearms in that vicinity, up to that time.

An inquiry was made and it was found that he had started that morning, for home, by way of Choster (?) City accompanied by a man with a gun, that was seen to come back into the village early in the afternoon. He was arrested with his gun, and it was found that one of his bullets just fit the ball hole in the man's head. He plead innocence and said he would prove it in a day or so. It was decided by a vote, that he should have four days to prove his innocence. During that time we had to guard him in a log cabin, for he had some friends that were continually trying to liberate him, and finally a rumor got afloat that they would liberate him by force of arms, at the last moment, if we persisted in trying to hang him. On the day of the execution every man in the village and suburbs was requested to be on the ground chosen for execution, to see how many were for and against hanging him. It was found that a small majority was for hanging him. Still some persisted that he should not be hung. The order was given that the criminal should be brought to the gallows, which was a limb of a big pine tree. The criminal was brought in sitting, blindfolded, with hands and feet bound, on the top of a big dry goods box, on a wagon drawn by a pair of oxen. The gallows³⁴ was put around his neck. Then he was asked if he had anything to say. He only proclaimed his innocence. Then the order was given, the oxen were driven ahead. The box tumbled off the wagon so the man fell about six feet and was soon dead. No demonstration was made against the hanging, although it was expected there would be a severe battle. Every man was armed with pistols and Bowie³⁵ knives. The man that was shot was known to have considerable gold with him, when he started out of town, which no doubt was the object for shooting him.³⁶

³⁴ Sic. Should be "noose"

³⁵ In the text spelled "bowey"

³⁶ I did not find in the California Digital Newspaper Collection a murder case which exactly lined up with Bethuel's recollections some fifty years later, but there were two cases reported in the contemporary newspapers, as shown below. The one that seems most like Bethuel's recollection is the murder of William Holt by Michael Grant in September 1852. Bethuel remembers the victim was shot in the head, whereas Holt was shot in the breast. In both cases there was a delay to give the accused a chance to prove his innocence, although the two versions differ on exactly how many days. Both agree that Grant was executed publicly in front of a large crowd, although Bethuel provides more details about exactly how the execution was carried out.

The initial report of the murder of William Holt by Michael Grant was in the Sacramento Daily Union on 27 September 1852:

A murder was committed near Weaverville on the person of a miner named William Holt, formerly of Cole county, Mo., aged about twenty-four years. His corpse was found on the summit of the mountain, about three miles east of Weaverville, pierced by a bullet through the breast. The supposed murderers have been arrested.

A second report was in the Daily Alta California on 12 October 1852, citing an undated issue of the Shasta Courier: Wells, Fargo & Co. furnished us a copy of the Shasta Courier last evening. It is the first copy we have received in two months. We extract the following items of interest: Michael Grant, the man convicted of the murder of William Holt, near Weaverville, was hung in that place on Tuesday at 1 o'clock P. M., by the citizens. He died protesting his innocence, and left a letter addressed to a friend affirming the same thing—and yet the evidence upon which he was convicted does not permit the momentary existence of a doubt as to his guilt. He was an Irishman by birth.

The most comprehensive report was in the Daily Alta California on 23 October 1852:

An Execution in the Mines

Mr. Editor: —If you should deem these few items of news from the mines worth a place in your paper, use them accordingly. I have made a tour through the mining regions, north, and met with several incidents worth the telling, among which is the following: On the 23d September, a man named Holt, from Missouri, who had been mining in the neighborhood of Weaverville, Trinity county, was returning, it is said, to his family, with the fruits of his labor in gold dust and certificates of deposit. About four miles from the above village he was shot. His body was discovered shortly after by a train of packers, who brought the news to town. The shocking news flew like wildfire; the miners flocked in from every point around, and had the body brought to town. It was a most touching spectacle to see the murdered corpse, made fast on a mule, and borne up the street in the midst of the miners, silent and sorrowful, but like to burst with pent up rage. After the due investigation, the corpse was decently disposed of, and then for the murderer. Suspicion began to settle fast upon a man who had borne a very bad character for some time amongst them, and who had left town with Holt, and had been seen with him going in the direction of the spot where the body was found. After a short investigation the Sheriff arrested him. Efforts were made to have him left in the hands of the civil authorities, till the court would sit. But no. All such overtures were overruled by the multitude, declaring they had no confidence in the civil authorities.

Saturday, the 25th inst., was appointed for his trial. At this hour a jury was empanelled; a judge appointed; a lawyer assigned to the prisoner; one appointed for the prosecution on behalf of the miners, and the trial proceeded. The lawyer for the prisoner though protesting against the whole proceeding declared to me that it was conducted with as much fairness and moderation as any trial he has ever witnessed — that nothing but legal testimony had been admitted — that the judge's charge and conduct throughout had been unobjectionable. When brought forward to say why sentence should not be passed upon him, he "declared his innocence; lamented his great misfortune in being accused; asked at least ten days to write to his friends; arrange his affairs and prepare for death; that in the meantime the murderer might be discovered, and he saved so unjust a punishment." The multitude were divided: some were for having him executed immediately, some for giving him five days; some ten. Those for the last were by far the most numerous. He therefore got the respite. They will not soon regret having taken the side of mercy. He sent for a Catholic Clergyman who happened to be visiting there, and became a most bumble penitent in his hands. From this gentleman's first visit to him he seemed to be busied only in the examination of his past life, and preparation for his death. He wished to avoid every conversation about worldly matters; totally engrossed with the desire of repentance for his past crimes before he should stand before his eternal judge. He became perfectly calm and resigned, forgave every one who had a hand in his death, begged forgiveness of all, and desired that all should pray for him. He prepared a paper which was read at his execution, and which gave great edification. I expect to get possession of this document in a few days. He was executed on Tuesday, the 5th inst, in the town of Weaverville, amid a great concourse of people, who were quite taken by surprise at the calm composure, the meek resignation, and solemn and sincere sentiments of compunction with which he submitted to his fate. Thus passed out of this life Michael Grant, a native of Longford, (it may be Lectrim,) Ireland; a melancholy instance of the manifold misfortunes to be expected by the exiled children of that misgoverned country, who become unfaithful to the precepts of the holy religion in which they have been brought up.

The other murder was reported in the Sacramento Daily Union of 27 September 1852:

The Shasta Courier of the 25th inst. says that a miner named Mitchell was murdered, on the east side of the Sacramento river, near Churn Creek, on the 17th. He was shot through the temple, and his brains beaten out. Two men, named Tom Bates and Ira Tattum, supposed to be guilty of the murder, were pursued and arrested by Capt. Corsant, near Feather River.

After that everything went on quietly through the remainder of the summer. When it began to get frosty and our diggings began to get poorer, we three that had been at work together agreed to go home to the states (as they were called) by way of San Francisco and Panama. I wanted to come across the plains but they went that way and now they wanted to have a little sea voyage, for they had never seen the ocean. They agreed that if I would go that way home with them, we would all go our again in the spring, across the plains.

We passed a week in San Francisco waiting for the steamer and had a fine voyage to Panama on the fine new steamer "Golden Gate".³⁷ It was the rainy season on the isthmus, and the road was a muddy one.³⁸ Mules could hardly travel. Those that set out to ride, most all, got their animals stuck in the mud and had to leave the others or foot it most of the way to the Chagres³⁹ River. From there we took passage down the river to within a few miles of Aspinwall⁴⁰, where we took cars for the remainder of the way to Aspinwall. Arriving there we found no steamer and had to wait a week for one to arrive and three days more for it to get ready to start for New York.⁴¹

We had a pleasant voyage to Kingston, Jamaica, where we stopped Sunday for coal, which was brought aboard in bags, by men and women. We passengers strolled about town. I went to church; the sight was very curious. Families, as I saw them, were either a white father and a negro mother or vice versa, and the children all colors.

We started from Kingston for New York and had fine warm weather until we passed Cape Hatteras, where we took a cold northwest, mixed with snow and hail, which made us thinly clad passengers keep below.

³⁷ The SS Golden Gate entered service for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in 1851 on the San Francisco to Panama City route. [Wikipedia article on Pacific Mail Steamship Company]

³⁸ The dry season in Panama runs from December to April [Postal Gazette, November 2006]. Frosts would have started in the late summer/early fall in the mountains near Weaverville. Bethuel must have left Weaverville for San Francisco, and gone on to Panama sometime before December.

³⁹ Spelled in the text "Shagress". This is largest river in central Panama.

⁴⁰ Now known as Colon, Aspinwall was the name used commonly by Americans in the 1850s for the main port on the Caribbean coast of Panama. It was named after William Henry Aspinwall, who was the promoter of the Panama Railroad. [Wikipedia article on Colon, Panama.]

⁴¹ The Postal Gazette in the November 2006 issue described the route across Panama from the Caribbean to the Pacific, i.e. the opposite direction from Bethuel's travel:

Transportation across the Isthmus of Panama was a major problem for the traveler by that route. From the mouth of the Chagres River on the Caribbean, where the steamers anchored in the early years, to the City of Panama on the Pacific, was a journey of about sixty miles. Sometimes, when the seas were heavy, it was impossible to land, and the steamers rolling off the mouth of the Chagres for days before the passengers could be put ashore. For the journey on the river, native canoes were poled up by three or four natives, carried two to four passengers. During the dry season, from December until April, the head of navigation of the Chagres was at Gorgona, a village situated thirty-nine and half miles up the river from its mouth. The boat trip out the river to Gorgona required three to three and half days. Here travelers went overland to Panama for a twenty miles ride by mules or horses. (The railway will be open in January 1855). The lack of vessel on the Pacific side of the Isthmus compelled the restless Argonauts to wait weeks in some cases for accommodations to reach California.

We arrived in New York Saturday night, but not many passengers went ashore until Sunday morning, which I did due to my partners as they belonged in Wisconsin and Massachusetts. I then joined two men that were bound to Boston and we hurried to a barber shop to get cleaned and shaved. I had already taken some cold and getting my hair cut and head cleaned added to my cold very much, which effected my head so severely that by the time we got anchored and off the Fall River steamer, I had nearly lost my senses, so I told the Boston men how I was, requesting them to look for me and to see that I got off at the right place to take the train for Sandwich. I was put off all right by them and told the station master where I was going. The conductor saw that I got off the train there. When I arrived there I told the stage driver where I belonged, and by the time I got there I was so out of my head that I knew no one, but they knew me, and took me home. I didn't know my home nor my mother or sisters for some time. The doctor was sent for and by the next morning I began to know where I was. The doctor said I had brain fever. Fever and ague set in, which the doctor could not cure me of.

Springtime came and the news came that the ship Massachusetts had arrived in Woods Hole, and some time John Thomas came to see us. He had changed very much since I saw him last, but my folks that had seen him later, knew him and made me acquainted with him. Soon after we had congratulated him and inquired about the two uncles, the chills came upon me and they always made me cross. My younger sister⁴² came with a shawl to put around me to keep me warm, which had no effect except to cause me to throw it off rather bad humoredly. John seemed to be touched by it and he wondered if he would treat a sister that way. Without stopping to think that my time to quiz him had not yet come, I replied that he had better go home and see his sister, but I had no thought of what I said. The next afternoon, that being my good day and the weather fine, I was just putting on my overcoat, to take a walk around the shore, when John came a calling. He remarked that I looked rather feeble to be walking far alone and offered to take a walk with me, which offer I accepted, thought I had no further object than to have his company, and I did not suppose he had any other object, until we had rounded a point of the shore hiding us from our house and not being near any other.

He asked me what I meant by the remark I made to him the night before. I could not think at first what I had said, and asked him what it was. When he told me it occurred to me that this was as good a time as ever to talk over our little secret with him. I told him I meant what I said, but said he, "I don't know as I have a sister or any other relations alive." I answered, "That may be true, but you know that you did have them when you left your home in the state of New York." He inquired how I came to think he belonged in New York. I told him Manzanillo, Mexico I heard so. He promised that if I would tell him who told me, he would tell me all he knew about his friends. I said, "Do you remember Hinds, Snow and Cunningham, that were with you voyage before last?" "Yes", said he, "but where did you ever meet them?" I told him in California. Then he could not remember that he had ever told them anything about his name or friends, until I described the time and place, which he seemed to remember something of. Then he owned up that he did have a father, mother, sister and several brothers, six year before when he had left home. He said it was only a boyish freak that sent him from home, but after it was done he resolved that he would not go back until he was of age and his own man. He was of age now and was going home as soon as he could be married, so as to take his wife with him. I advised him that I thought it would be better if he went home first and that if it was my sister that he expected

⁴² Florentine

to marry, I thought he would have to, and that if he did not tell her his story so that I would hear of it inside of two days, I should tell her myself, and I should not approve of her marrying under such circumstances, until he could prove in some way that his story was true; and the quickest and best way would be for him to go home and bring back a letter, from some friend describing him, and to say that he had no crime standing against him. That very evening he told his story to my sister, so it was told to my mother. The next afternoon, as I was lounging alone in the sitting room, my mother came out of the parlor, with eyes looking wild, and she said to me, "What do you think? John Thomas is not John Thomas at all, but Thomas Chatfield, instead." When I told her that I had known he was not going by his right name, two years before, she wondered how and why I had kept it to myself so long. The next week Thomas went home. He was gone a week and brought back a letter from his sister telling us how the fatted calf was killed, for the one they had supposed dead,⁴³ they hoped to see home again accompanied by his wife. In about a week they were married and started for his home.

I was about over the chills and fever, but very weak and thin. The doctor told me that he was afraid I would never get my strength back without a change of residence, that it would be better if I went to sea; that it would never do for me to go back to California. I concluded that if I had to go back to sea again, I would go a whaling, although I had always looked at that business with scorn on account of the voyages being so long, but the business was paying so well that I shipped to go with one of my uncles, that was to sail in two months. Thomas (now my brother-in-law) was going second mate. I had corresponded with my old mining partners during the winter. Both of them had been sick all winter, like myself, and had given up going to California again. I gained strength very slowly and was thinking of going a trip coasting with my father, who was running a vessel, but my mother was not easy to let me go for fear I might get sick again where she could not attend me.

Finally I got an invitation from Thomas to come up in the country, saying it was a healthier place, that it might do me good. As my sister was there, mother soon gave her consent and I soon landed in the country, in Orange County, New York.

It appeared that I was very welcome there, and the change was very marked and pleasant. I made many acquaintances and most pleasing of them all was Thomas's sister. Although she seemed to have some admirers, I decided by appearances that she was not very devoted to any of them, and after a week's visit, when I was about to return home, I ventured to say to the young miss that if I should hear of her not being married, when I came home from my voyage, I should visit her again.

When I arrived home my mother observed that I looked better and I was sure I felt better and was sorry I had not stayed longer in the country. I would have stayed longer only that I was getting so attached to the place, people and particularly the miss, that I was afraid that I might be in the way of other more worthy admirers. I had gained permission to correspond whilst on my voyage, had heard several times that my lady was still single, even up to the time we arrived in New Zealand on our way home, where we stopped a week to refit ship give the crew liberty, and then paint and clean the ship.

⁴³ Reference to the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)

We were now two years from home. After spending about a week in port, we sailed for home by way of Cape Horn. The next day a big sperm whale was sighted. It was blowing hard at the time and it was very rugged so that the Captain demurred some about trying to kill the whale but finally he sent two boats down, the first and the second mate, that I was harpooner for. I harpooned the whale but he proved to be a fighter and turned around and came for the boat. It being so rough that we could not handle the boat quick enough to dodge him, he took the boat in his mouth in the middle and bit her in two nearly equal parts, which threw us all in the water. One of the men (that was always very scared) tried to get hold of someone else, jumped on my back and grabbed around my arms so tight that I could do nothing but sink until I swung him around in front of me and by raising my foot against him, I shook him clear of me, but he took my clothes with him in rags. It was a hard fight for me. I was much exhausted and had swallowed much water. When I had got almost to the top of the water, and he was coming up as fast as I was (being as good a swimmer as I was), he struck afoul of some of my rags of my clothes and he was on my back again in a second, with my arms bound to my sides again. I had just presence of mind enough left to remember how I got rid of him before. I exercised my last bit of strength to clear myself from him and that was the last I remembered. When I gained my senses I was on top of the water but had no strength to help myself. I could not move an arm, neither a leg, but I seemed to keep on the top of the water, or keep my mouth out by will power. The water kept rising from my stomach, and my senses revived, until one of the boat's oars seemed to drift to me, and from the motion of it, I succeeded in getting my chin over the oar. Then I felt a great relief and gained strength fast. It felt as if a current of pain was streaming from the ends of every finger and toe. After remaining this way a few minutes, I succeeded in getting an arm over the oar. Then I felt happy. Indeed I had no care for anything or anybody, but felt content to lie there and rest. After a while I began to wonder where the rest of the crew were and looked around a little. As I rose on a wave I noticed the forward half of the boat laying right side up but a little way from me. It looked like a nice place to rest and I paddled on my oar toward it, with my hands. When I got to it I found a coil of the whale line laying on the thwarts just as it was hauled in when the whale hit the boat. I crawled in on top of it and lay down to rest now with assistance. I had just got there when I heard someone groaning as if in pain. I looked and saw one man clinging to the other end of the boat, that was bottom side up. I recognized him as the man that had been clinging to me. I spoke to him and advised him to come where I was, observing that it was a good place. Right away the whale was there spouting angrily. I looked and saw him coming for us with his jaw in the air ready to bite. I had but little fear of the whale but a great fear of the man beside me, and I strung from him with all the strength I had. At that minutes I heard the whale jaw cracking down on the boat. The thought came to me that the whale jaw must have struck the other man. I had no further thought of him, but secured an oar, the same one that I had lost, and paddled away from the wreck of the boat for fear I might get moved on again by the whale, or the man if I stayed around there. I had now so far reentered my senses that I kept looking for the ship.

I soon noticed her about two miles away and a boat a half mile in the opposite direction. I paddled for the boat but could not see that I neared her for some time, but after a while they noticed the second mate, who was between me and the boat, so rowed toward him and then they saw me. When they picked me up, all of our boat crew was there but one man and that was the one that had been trying to drown both of us, and would have done so if he could have held onto me. It was the mate's boat that I was in and she was well loaded, so he took great care not to go

near the wreck for fear the whale might hit us again. The missing man was seen from the ship and another boat sent for him. When we got to the ship the gale had increased so that the captain would not let us lower any more boats. The whale was still seen swimming around the wreck of the boat, to the leeward of the ship so we were ordered to man the ship's head rigging and try to harpoon and drag the whale, when the ship was run onto him. We found him too cunning to let the ship get right to him. After that had been tried, it was blowing so hard that sail was taken in, and the ship hove to for about twenty-four hours. I had often heard of the severity of drowning people's grasp and I can testify to the truthfulness of its severity, for the man that grasped me was near enough to being drowned to show what they can do. It was very hard for me to forget the man that drowned, he being as good a swimmer as myself.

The rest of our voyage around Cape Horn and home was uneventful except that about six weeks before we arrived, I was so unfortunate as to put a shoulder out of joint, which happened from falling on wet slippery decks in a gale of wind. It was a sore job, for although they managed to set it all right, for me it became very painful and as the rugged weather continued for several days after it made it very hard to keep in any position that was bearable. It improved very fast when the sea got smooth, so that by the time we got to Vineyard Haven I was among the men at work again.

The next morning, as we were getting the ship under way to go to Nantucket, several men beside myself, came near being killed by the falling of the topsail halyard block, whilst hoisting a top sail.

When we arrived at Nantucket, I visited some friends for three days before crossing the sound to my own home.⁴⁴ My father had died whilst we were on the voyage, but I could not realize it, although it was fresh in the minds of my friends.⁴⁵

I stopped at home but a short time, for my mind was very much on the girl in Orange County and I soon ventured to pay the visit I had promised, without waiting to hear whether she had married. To my joy, I found her still single and I wasted but little time finding out whether it would be accepted or not. I was assured of acceptance by the end of the week so I left for home with an understanding that I should return again in a short time to claim my prize, which was duly claimed many years ago. So we have now several young girls who call us grandparents.

Written by
Bethuel Gifford Handy, of Cotuit, Cape Cod
at the request of his wife who was
Mary Elizabeth Chatfield
of Cornwall, New York

⁴⁴ Cotuit

⁴⁵ James Harvey Handy died July 29, 1854 per FamilySearch.org.

