

A MULTIFACETED MINER: THE YOUTHFUL EXPERIENCES OF JOSEPH B. CHAFFEE IN CALIFORNIA, 1850-51

**Richard H. Peterson
Professor of History
San Diego State University**

In Jim Holliday's masterful, epic narrative and analysis of numerous letters, journals, diaries, and reminiscences of the California argonauts who came to work the diggings, make their pile, and return home wealthier than when they arrived, not all gold seekers could receive equal coverage. Although listed in the bibliography of Holliday's *The World Rushed In*, Joseph B. Chaffee is not mentioned specifically in the text.¹ Yet, he left a very articulate collection of twenty-one manuscript letters to family members back home in New York as he traveled the demanding Panama route, adjusted to and observed life in the mines, and eventually returned to his native state, having "seen the Elephant."² Although not as penetratingly insightful and eloquent as the classic Dame Shirley letters, the recollections of Sarah Royce, and other primary gold rush accounts of equal merit, Chaffee's previously unpublished correspondence is relatively typical of the almost countless sources on the great adventure to and in the new El Dorado.³ Chaffee's experiences provide an interesting case study and offer fresh, illuminating observations regarding the mass movement of American dreamers to California in the mid-nineteenth century. His adventure is especially valuable because he was not only a typical prospector, but also a constable, a deputy

sheriff, a teamster, a retail clerk, a carpenter, and a saloon owner in the mother lode. Thus, he was able to observe the new country from various



Joseph B. Chaffee in mid-life while residing in Afton, N.Y.

vantage points. In addition, his account of the Panama route complements the more common reminiscences of the longer sea route around Cape Horn.⁴

Although more eastern gold rushers chose the longer, less expensive, route around the Cape, many argonauts like Chaffee took the Panama crossing. It was shorter, safer, and faster than the Cape Horn passage, which covered 18,000 nautical miles and took five to eight months. The Panama route was navigable throughout the year and generally familiar after Congress subsidized the United States Mail and Pacific Mail companies in 1847 to utilize the passage. From 1850, when steamship service improved, to 1855 when a railway was built to bridge the Isthmus, the Panama crossing became more attractive.⁵ In fact, until the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, "the Panama passage remained the favored route between California and "the States" for those who could afford it."⁶

Between March 13, 1850 and October 12, 1851, Joseph Chaffee wrote letters from New York, Cuba, Panama, and California to his stepfather Merlin Jackson and his mother Sylvia Chaffee Jackson of South Bainbridge, later renamed Afton, New York. During this period of transit to and residence in California, he was nineteen to twenty-one years old, a mere youngster at a time when a forty-year old miner was regarded as an old Sourdough.⁷

His initial letter to his parents on March 13, 1850 from New York City brimmed with optimism. Like most western migrants, paid several hundred dollars for his passage, but that did not dampen his enthusiasm. He wrote, "We are all bound for the 'Land of Promise'...and all in the first rate spirits," expecting to find gold in abundance. "So Hurrah!! for California!!"⁸ A relative, Justus White, who later married Joseph's stepsister, saw the boy depart on March 13. He reassured his anxious parents that the steamer, the "Georgia, was a very fine boat with excellent conveniences and comforts...(which) went out with the trifling number of six hundred and fifty passengers."⁹

After a week at sea, Joseph had much to tell his parents on arrival in Havana, Cuba, on March 19. His letter related the usual shipboard problems of sea sickness and overcrowding, especially since additional passengers had boarded at Charleston, South Carolina. However, the company to which he apparently belonged acted as a kind of buffer against the sometimes unpleasant effects of shipboard life, including death at sea and excessive drinking, swearing, and gambling. As he informed his parents, "There are some on board that I don't think would stop Gambling and drinking if the ship was going to the Bottom."¹⁰ Such pastimes as he described should have prepared him for life in the roaring California mining camps. Curiously, unlike so many other Anglos in



Jackson & Chaffee Store—Afton, New York, about 1860

this era of Manifest Destiny, he expressed no overt prejudice against the Cubans or Hispanics that he met in Havana. Indeed, he found that "the inhabitants are very Polite to Strangers and treat them with much Respect."¹¹

Despite the addition of from 400 to 500 more passengers from a steamer out of New Orleans, his safe arrival on the Isthmus at the end of March prompted another letter to his parents. As he awaited passage across Panama, he described the east coast city of Chagres in elaborate detail and found reason to comment again that "the natives here treat all strangers well and are very kind to them...Our company is in Good Spirits and we Have Fun every day."¹² His joyful reaction is a far departure from the more typical remarks of an American member of a Massachusetts emigrant company crossing Mexico to reach the mines in 1849:

To walk the street safely you must carry a revolver in each hand and keep you eyes skinned. The first night we were here (Mexico City) we went to a bath-house and while taking a bath were robbed of \$100. We went to the Alcalde (a mayor with judicial powers) the next day for redress and found he owned the house. There is no safety here for Americans from assassination.¹³

Chaffee was spared such problems on the Isthmus.

Unlike other gold seekers who chose the rigorous Panama route and experienced unanticipated problems such as malarial fever, unsanitary jungle conditions, exorbitant costs, a chaotic and inefficient government, and delays reaching San Francisco, Chaffee and his companions did not suffer through serious difficulties during the seventy-mile trek up the fever-infested Chagres River and across the Isthmus by mule to Panama City.¹⁴ As he informed his parents in early April, "the company which I am in is full...and I think we have got just as good a Company as there is in this Crowd. My health never was better than it has been since I left Home...It has always been reported in the states that it was very unhealthy on this Isthmus. It is all a Humbug. It is a story Got up by the speculators to make folks hurry off and pay a large Premium for Tickets to Get away. It is very

healthy here indeed and I don't believe that you could find a city in New York State of the same number of inhabitants but what has 3 times the number of deaths that there is in this city."¹⁵ However, Chaffee's opinion was not universally held. According to historian Andrew Rolle, "some men even chose to walk across the entire Isthmus from the settlement at Colon to Balboa on the Pacific side rather than spend the money and suffer the trials of a dreadful tropical journey by canoe and mule."¹⁶ Women, on the other hand, often complained in the period from 1849 to 1869 about the danger, disease, threat of death, food, climate, and native barbarity and poverty on the Panama trail.¹⁷

Although some of Chaffee's friends suffered mild cases of diarrhea, he allegedly avoided it by eating lots of rhubarb. He claimed that it kept his stomach and bowels in a very healthy state. Also, by apparently belonging to a well-organized and well-financed joint stock company, Chaffee no doubt was able to fare better than others, although company members took turns repairing ships in Panama City to supplement their finances. His optimism undaunted, he closed his letter to his parents by predicting: "You may look for me home in 3 years from fall (1850) and if any of the Girls will wait until that time I will bring Home a pile and marry and settle down. No danger of my bringing Home a Senorita from this country for they are a shade too dark for my taste."¹⁸ At last, after commenting favorably on the Latinos, his latent prejudice surfaced in an era when American ethnocentrism and outspoken racism against the Californios and the Mexicans commonly appeared in the writing of New Englanders such as Richard Henry Dana and Thomas Jefferson Farnham and the correspondents of the recent Mexican-American War.¹⁹

After what must have seemed an interminable six weeks on the Isthmus, Chaffee caught a steamer for San Francisco. In the meantime, he sold his steerage ticket for \$350, which allowed him to purchase cabin passage before prices escalated. He noted, "If one could only have known before he left how tickets were selling in this town, they might have made more money."²⁰ Since leaving New York, he had lost twenty-five pounds and had been ill for five days with "a sort of Summer

Complaint."²¹ But this surely did not discourage him from joining the great California lottery.

Within a month, he arrived in San Francisco after a safe voyage, having avoided the sea sickness which afflicted his two best friends. In his obvious excitement he wrote little about San Francisco's population and architecture, unlike the other cities he had described in greater detail. However, he was amazed by wages as high as twelve dollars a day and the display of a million dollars on the monte tables in a gambling house in addition to other cash in iron safes about the room. From San Francisco, he arranged for travel to Sacramento, where provisions for the mines could be purchased. He was now twenty years old and eager to find the *madre de oro*.²²

By mid June, Chaffee and his companions were working the diggings at Salmon Falls on the south fork of the American River about thirty-five miles from Sacramento. The town of Salmon Falls grew to a population of more than 3,000 during the 1850s as more men came to work the nearby mines.²³ In 1850, Chaffee achieved modest success using the rocker or cradle. Like the more effective long tom, this device allowed several prospectors to process more gold-bearing debris than they could by panning individually. Chaffee's initial earnings averaged about fourteen dollars per day. Although not overwhelming, it was sufficiently promising to inform his parents that "this is the country for me, the more I see of it the better I like it and if I should give my opinion I shall say that this is the country for all Single men....I think that any man can make money and make it very fast if he has his health. It costs something to be sick in this country but it is the most healthy country that I ever was in to say the least...."²⁴

Like all miners he anxiously awaited letters and news from home and set Sunday aside for rest, recreation, and necessary chores. Ever mindful of his New York home and family, he sent his sister, Mary, gold dust to be made into a plain gold band ring on the assumption that she would "wear it to Remember her Dear Brother Joe."²⁵ Distance had not dulled his sentiment. In fact, the ring inscribed "Mary" is still in the possession of the family of Margarett Chaffee Westcott.²⁶

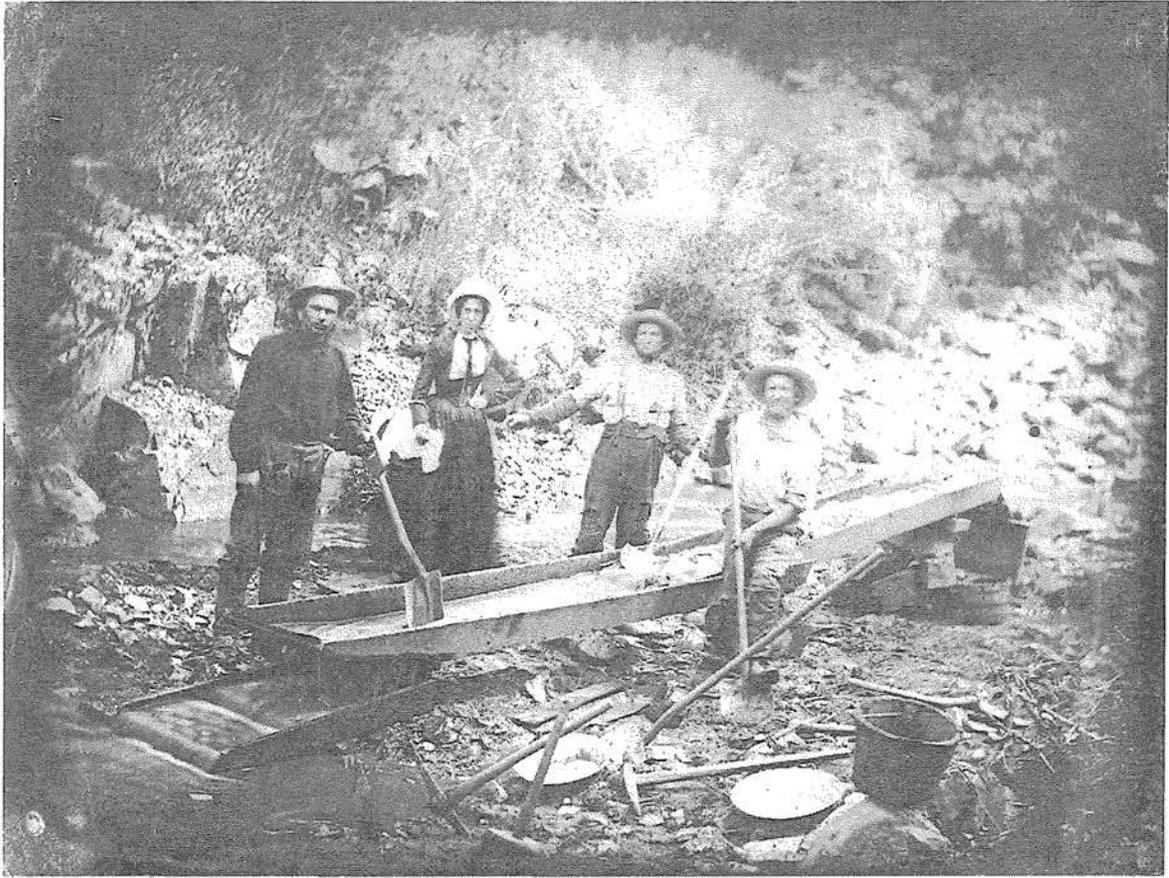
By early August, 1850, it had been five months

since Joseph had left home and after two months of mining at Salmon Falls, his enthusiasm was beginning to wane. Long working days, fatigue, intermittent injury and illness, and no letters from New York had adversely affected his attitude. Nonetheless, he was continuing to turn a modest profit. Given the eventual disillusionment about finding easy money, he wrote his parents to "tell everyone to come to California that want to and run their own risk, but I want every man to understand that in this country a man earns his Bread by the sweat of his Brow."²⁷ No longer the naive optimist, Joseph had become educated by the hard reality of stoop-labor mining.

In late August, the arrival of a letter from his parents lifted his spirits considerably. Also, he was able to send his mother \$500 in gold dust as his mining efforts improved. Having now officially formed a stock company with nineteen other argonauts, he was working on shares. The company had cleared a dividend of \$275 in July after paying all debts, dues, and demands. He boasted that he could make more money in California than in New York, if he stayed healthy.²⁸

Although Chaffee tended to business as usual, he left a revealing account of those who did not. "You cannot find a place but that it is claimed. But a great many of these men came here expecting to find Gold by the Bushel and when they got here they found Gold so scare that they became disheartened and will not work because they cannot make Big Wages and then there are plenty more that are just the same here that they were at Home. Drink and Gamble away all they Earn. They will dig in the mines a while and then go down to the City (San Francisco) and in a few days come back penniless and dig more."²⁹ By this time, Joseph had learned that mining was not only hard work but hard living. "It is like going to (New York's) State Prison for 2 years to live without the enjoyment of Society and living on Coarse common food and Sleeping out of doors with nothing to shelter me but the Broad canopy of Heaven."³⁰ But heaven could wait. Young Joseph was here for the money, not to save his soul.

His experience with damming and diverting a river to mine the exposed gravel produced mixed



Scenes from Daguerotype #2; Auburn Ravine in 1852

results when the water level rose four feet and washed away almost every dam. However, Chaffee's company escaped relatively unscathed since its dam was the only one that apparently produced a profit. The twenty members of the company took out about "\$16,000.00 from the Race and Bank together and after Paying the Expenses we had an average of \$500 each."³¹ He wrote his parents, "Suffice it to say that I have...got the dust in my pocket to pay all demands and I shouldn't wonder if a little more."³²

By early October, he had abandoned Salmon Falls for the north fork of the American River about four miles from the Sierra foothills town of Auburn in what was called "The Secret Ravine." He did not reveal the origin of the name; but he exposed something of his hidden character and reticence by telling his parents that "I would like to hear from some of the Girls (at home), but is against my principles to correspond with

females."³³ Perhaps, he had been in the exclusive company of men too long, but not long enough to forget his New York roots and romances.

By the end of October, he had left the Ravine and the company because of the hot weather and the lack of nearby sources of water. Having returned to Salmon Fall, he was elected constable by a three-fourths majority. Although he continued prospecting at a profit, his new office at the age of twenty brought additional remuneration, especially during the rainy season when mining came to a virtual halt. As he wrote, "for Serving a Summons \$3, for Subpoenas \$2. Each Execution \$5 and 5 percent on all property Sold, for Summoning (a) Jury \$2 each and 50 cents per mile in all cases and everything Else in proportions" As he became more involved in his public responsibilities, he expressed less desire to return home until his three-year plan had elapsed.³⁴ Chaffee was no longer just another jackass miner, but a respected elected official in a raw frontier society



Scenes from Daguerreotype #3 "Head of Auburn Ravine, 1852." (Shows Chinese)

that had to make its own rules and regulations and mining district codes given the easy temptation to commit crimes from theft to homicide.

Unlike many who deserted the diggings or could not afford the journey home, Chaffee was doing well in late 1850 and developing an attachment to California. In a letter to his parents (but especially his mother) he wrote, "I can only say that the Journey was well worth the money and if I should live to Return again to you, I shall never regret the time and money spent in Visiting this land of plenty."³⁵ He also noted that he had purchased a share in a potentially profitable claim. However, since winter made mining difficult he found extra work plowing fields and hauling timber for a bridge to be built across a fork of the American River. Despite his continued obsession with his health and longevity, he remained in good spirits, eager to hear from his New York friends and family but increasingly committed to his adopted home.³⁶

This commitment in part reflected his growing public responsibilities. By January, 1851, he had been appointed deputy sheriff "to act in this part of the county and that taken with the constable business have kept me flying." His activities included the arrest and incarceration of eight Frenchmen who allegedly had driven P. W. Hall of Jackson, Pennsylvania, from his claim and threatened his life. Having chased horse thieves for a week in the company of the deputy sheriff from Coloma (the site of James Marshall's 1848 gold discovery), he apprehended two of the suspects. He noted the superiority of Mexican over American horses, and informed his parents that "we have obtained more information and got track of another den of Horse Thieves and are bound to break them up or Hang Every one of them and I think we will succeed after a while."³⁷ On the frontier stealing a man's horse was nearly equivalent to stealing his wife, if he were fortunate enough to have one.

Chaffee's mind was not always on enforcing the law. Loneliness for female companionship was a constant problem for the California miners of the 1850s.³⁸ Although perhaps intended facetiously, he requested of his parents in early 1851: "I wish you would stick up a notice for me to see if I can Obtain An able Bodied Young lady not over 18 years of Age or under 16. Good looking about 5 foot 4 inches and anxious to Become Mistress of a Beautiful California Mansion (a log Cabin 10 x 12 and furnished in true Pioneer style). Just tell them that I am in (the) Market to be sold to the Highest Bidder and Now is the chance. There are several Spanish 'Senoritas' waiting for me and I shall want returns by the Bearer (of this letter), and I would Earnestly request you to impress upon their minds the extreme danger of delays."³⁹ If taken at face value, young Joseph was not above advertising in effect for a mail-order bride and that he had found California, at least when he wrote, a suitable place to settle down. With Anglo women of the "marriageable" kind in short supply in early 1851, gold alone no longer drove his passions. Whether he received inquiries or offers is not known.

As adventurous as he was mercurial, he again was writing his parents within a month about his intention to return to New York. He had been pressured, especially by his mother, to do so for sometime; but he still had not gotten enough of California. In the early spring, 1851, he wrote, "If I remain in this country another year I shall take a small view of the Mountains and Valleys...for when I once leave it I shall not return again to see it...and if I [were] to spend a couple of years in viewing the wide world, I shall not lose anything by the operation."⁴⁰ Like other argonauts, Chaffee appreciated the scenic splendor of this western wilderness.

By the end of April, 1851, he had disposed of his latest mining-claim for \$450. However, his official duties as the local constable and deputy sheriff kept him occupied in addition to a new job clerking at a store for \$100 a month. He complained that the "Sheriff Business would afford me a High living and plenty of travel about the country. But the Expenses are very Heavy...If a man had a Home to live at and plenty of Horses to use Gratis, he might make a heap of money."⁴¹

Like all men in Gold Rush California, Chaffee had to struggle with the constant drain of inflation. Indeed, it was usefully the merchants who "mined the miners" that reaped the greatest rewards.⁴² Perhaps, Joseph said it better when he observed "it is the monied men that makes [sic] the money."⁴³

By the early summer, 1851, he was still undecided about the duration of his California residence. He flirted with the idea of buying a "rancho" as a farm and cattle ranch in association with others, but later abandoned the notion. Although he had experienced some good fortune in mining, it was obvious that he wanted to return home with a stake sufficient "to give me a good Start in Business so that I could live Comfortable, for I do think that I could make money much faster here than at Home."⁴⁴ Like so many others, he seemed to be hoping for that elusive lucky strike, hence his indecision about staying a while longer or returning sooner at his parents' behest.

By midsummer 1851, Chaffee's interest had turned to politics again. He commented, "The greatest excitement among the People of California at present is Politics and upon that subject they 'go it' for no doubt the coming election will be the most important one that will be held in this state for a long time and contrary to the Expectations of many, the people Generally take a Great interest in the result."⁴⁵ His observation was somewhat unexpected. Given the desire of most gold seekers to make their pile and return home as soon as possible, it is interesting that many apparently participated in the political process and cared about the outcome of elections.

Of course, Chaffee had a vested interest in politics as constable and deputy sheriff. He also was selected as a delegate to the Democratic county convention, which spoke for the Party at the local level against the opposition of the Whigs. He wrote to his family that "if I stay in this country 8 months longer it will be \$1000 in my pocket if we Elect a Democratic Sheriff..."⁴⁶ It appears that he was always looking for a way to rationalize a longer residence in California. Indeed, he even asked his parents to join him. "I know that you could Enjoy Yourselves better in this country than you could where you now are."⁴⁷

Apparently, Chaffee's political hopes were

dashed for he made no mention of the election in his next letter. However, he and a friend purchased a saloon when the owner, his longtime companion, returned to New York. Having tried his hand at various occupations, Chaffee was now willing to test another, especially because he was finding "Mining...not as Good as most any other branch of Business. At present the Blacksmith's trade is the most profitable one in California and will be for a long time to come."⁴⁸

Chaffee's last known letter from California to his parents was written on October 12, 1851. He noted that he was still prospecting, and doing well financially with the saloon. His reputation in the community of Salmon Falls continued in good standing. In fact, he was reelected constable in a landslide victory. He wrote that "the Office of Constable in the State of New York is looked upon as small but here it is actually worth more than the Sheriff's. If I remain here another year I would not give \$5 more than the Expense of the Election

to have the office of Sheriff warranted to me..."⁴⁹

Perhaps, the most revealing and tragic feature of his closing letter is his comment regarding the murder of an African American man. He believed that a black man "was...just as Good as a white man and on the strength of it he insulted a white man and through him went a Bullet and that was the last of him."⁵⁰ Either Chaffee had no official authority to arrest the suspected killer or he simply took such racially motivated violence as a matter of course, especially given the California law of 1850 which read that: "No black or mulatto person or Indian Shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of or against any white person (in a court of law). Every person who shall have one eighth part or more of Negro blood shall be deemed a mulatto, and every person who shall have one half Indian blood shall be deemed an Indian."⁵¹ Therefore, whites might murder or rob blacks and Indians and not be held accountable before the law as long as no white witnesses came



Scenes from Daguerotype; Auburn Ravine in 1852; (African-American with Long Tom.)

forth to testify on behalf of the injured parties. Given the racial prejudice against blacks, *Californios*, Mexicans, and the Chinese in California and the legal and extra-legal restrictions imposed upon their freedom, the death of a member of either group was symptomatic of the genocide inflicted upon the defenseless California Indians. For such racial and ethnic minorities, California was a shattered, if not a lethal, dream.⁵² In an earlier communication, Chaffee had informed his concerned parents that "the people here think as little of seeing a man or two shot down as you would of an Elliott and Beebe fight and less too guess. And I have no doubt but that you realize the actual danger that all Californians are placed in much more than we do ourselves."⁵³

In retrospect, nothing of real substance is known of Chaffee's family and boyhood, except that he had been in the mercantile business before coming to California.⁵⁴ Given his level of literacy and the cost of transportation, food, mining equipment, and other necessities required of his California adventure, he must have come from at least a middle-class background. In fact, like Chaffee, the vast majority of early gold seekers were not only young, enthusiastic, inexperienced at mining, and overwhelmingly male, but seldom from the working class. Most were merchants, professionals, skilled artisans, and semi-professionals or from families of this occupational background.⁵⁵

If Chaffee's early life is shrouded in mystery and speculation, his post-gold rush years are partially known. He left California in April, 1853, three years after his New York departure and many expressed indications of an earlier homecoming. From New York City he traveled on the Erie Railroad to Deposit, New York, on the Pennsylvania border, and on the morning of his arrival met Sarah Rogers, daughter of a physician. They married on July 11, 1853, and, according to Chaffee's granddaughter, the couple lived in South Bainbridge or Afton until 1866, when they moved to nearby Binghamton, New York. Chaffee became a prominent member of the Masonic Order and held the office of Grand High Priest and Grand Lecturer of a notable lodge in New York. His granddaughter did not reveal anything else about his life or occupation in his

middle and later years.⁵⁶ However, city directories at the New York Historical Society list Chaffee in 1867-68 as a "grand masonic lecturer" living on Exchange at the corner of Susquehanna in Binghamton. In 1870-71, he is identified as an insurance agent residing at 19 Exchange with offices at 36 Court (Street).⁵⁷ He apparently continued to reside in Binghamton, where he died on December 29, 1882, thirty years after leaving the California goldfields.⁵⁸

Although Chaffee's gold-rush correspondence is typical in such respects as initial expectations of great wealth, life aboard ship, loneliness, and other forms of social and physical deprivation, he seemed to lack the blatant racism, especially toward Hispanics, expressed by many Anglo argonauts in California or on the way to the mines. His descriptions went well beyond the standard references to weather, distances covered, and other routine matters found in numerous diaries, journals, and correspondence on the California gold rush. Chaffee's account of the Panama passage raises questions about commonly held contemporary assumptions that the route was generally demanding, dangerous, unhealthful, and subject to lengthy delays reaching San Francisco. Despite the disproportionately youthful population of the mining camps, Chaffee probably was one of the youngest constables and deputy sheriffs on the early California mining frontier. His public service revealed the pressing need for social stability and personal security and suggests that the justice system of due process coexisted with vigilantism in the mining camps and frontier communities, although the latter has played a larger role in the popular imagination.⁵⁹

Chaffee's writing is for the most part precise and detailed in description and thus reminiscent of Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*. Like Dana, who came to California aboard a hide and tallow trader in 1835, Chaffee was inclined to report strictly what he experienced or saw before him rather than indulge in exaggeration or rhetorical flourish.⁶⁰ In short, he told it as it was, at least from his own perspective, and thus increased our understanding of what the California gold rush actually meant to many Americans in the early 1850s. In particular, his occasional comparisons and analogies with life and institutions in New

York gives his letters more meaning than if they had been written exclusively with California in mind. Although a case study of a relatively typical California argonaut, Chaffee's work reflects a sense of adventure, dedication, and occupational flexibility that made him somewhat different from his ordinary companions of the pick and pan. His remarks back home suggest a fondness for life in California, an ability to adapt to adversity and opportunity, and perhaps given his youth, a desire to keep his elusive golden dream alive after others had frustratingly abandoned theirs. Always ready to seize the main entrepreneurial chance in public and private life, he realized belatedly that his ultimate opportunity for personal happiness and success was at last in New York. Like other prospectors, he did not jettison his cultural baggage simply by moving west. Yet, he would have many years to reflect on his former glory days as an expectant capitalist in the golden land by the sundown sea.

ENDNOTES

¹See J. S. Holliday, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 522.

²The Joseph Bennett Chaffee Letters, 1850-51, Typescript copy of MS, California State Library, Sacramento, California (hereafter noted as CL). The phrase, "to see the Elephant," was a "slang expression popular during the 1840s and 1850s that came to be applied to the gold rush experience. It then came to mean to have gone to the mining country with the hope of having an experience as exotic as seeing an elephant - then a rare creature even in a circus - but to have come away disappointed upon finding that, like other exhibits of showmanship, it was not so wonderful as advertised." See James D. Hart, *A Companion to California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, revised ed. 1987), 148.

³Some of the best descriptions of life in the diggings are in Louise A. K. S. Clappe, *The Shirley Letters from the California Mines, 1851-1852*, ed. by Carl I. Wheat (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949); Sarah Royce, *A Frontier Lady Recollections of the Gold Rush and Early California*, ed. by Ralph H. Gabriel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932); and Frank Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills. or Recollections of a Burnt Journal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1952, originally published, 1855).

⁴Richard B. Rice, William Bullough, and Richard J. Orsi, *The Elusive Eden: A New History of California* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1988), 180. A full description of the Panama route can be found in Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado, or, Adventures in the Path of Empire* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949), especially chs. 3-5, originally published in two vols. in 1850. A much briefer account is available in Charles W. Churchill, *Fortunes Are for*

the Few: Letters of a Forty-Niner, ed. by Duane Smith and David Weber (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1977), 17-38. Churchill, who made the crossing in 1849, noted the presence of cholera on the Isthmus. See p. 33. The deadly disease reached epidemic proportion in the United States in 1849 and was carried by gold seekers to California. See Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), especially 114-150.

⁵Rice, et al, *The Elusive Eden*, 179; John H. Kemble, *The Panama Route: 1848-1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943); and Oscar Lewis, *Sea Routes to the Gold Fields: The Migration by Water to California in 1849-1852* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949). The latter includes coverage of the Cape Horn passage.

⁶Rice, et al, *The Elusive Eden*, 179.

⁷Title page to CL.

⁸J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, March 13, 1850, New York City, CL, no. 1.

⁹Justus White to Friend Jackson, March 22, 1850, Boston, CL, unnumbered letter.

¹⁰J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, March 19, 1850, Cape Florida CL, no. 2. Chaffee did not mention membership in a joint-stock company, which was popular on the Cape Horn passage. However, he may well have belonged to such an organization during the voyage. On the use of such companies during the Cape Horn route, see Rice, et al, 179.

¹¹J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, March 31, 1850, Chagres, CL, no. 3.

¹²Ibid.

¹³As quoted in Octavius T. Howe, *Argonauts of '49* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 29.

¹⁴On the problems and prospects of the Panama route, see Holliday, *The World Rushed In*, 51; John W. Caughy, *The California Gold Rush* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975 paper ed.), 57-75; and Joseph Henry Jackson, *Anybody's Gold: The Story of California's Mining Towns* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1970 paper ed.), 28-36. The latter reveals the very difficult passage of Hiram Pierce across the Isthmus and on to San Francisco.

¹⁵J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, April 11, 1850, Panama City, CL, no. 4.

¹⁶Andrew Rolle, *Henry Mayo Newhall and His Times: A California Legacy* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1991), 10.

¹⁷Glenda Riley, "Women on the Panama Trail to California, 1849-1869," *Pacific Historical Review* 55 (November 1986): 531-548. One female traveler commented that the Panama passage was a "ride over a wild, inhuman country on the back of a wild, irresponsible mule driven by a wild, demoralized, irrepressible son of the tropics" See Riley, 547-548.

¹⁸J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, April 11, 1850, Panama City, CL, no. 4.

¹⁹See Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast. A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1840) and Thomas Jefferson Farnham, *Life. Adventures. and Travels in California* (New York: Nafis and Cornish, 1849). Also, see David J. Langum, "Californios and the Image of Indolence," *Western Historical Quarterly* 9 (April 1978): 181-196; and Gene Brack, "Mexican Opinion,

American Racism, and the War of 1846," *Western Historical Quarterly* 1 (April 1970): especially 166-174. A letter from a Mexican War veteran to the *Stockton Times* for April 6, 1850, prompted by the arrival in California of perhaps as many as 20,000 miners from Sonora in northwestern Mexico, between 1849-1851, helps to explain how the war intensified American racism. "I was in the Mexican War - I was - and I can tell you was some pumpkins at Chapultepec and Monterey - I know what Mexicans are - I do. They are no men; an army of Mexicans is of no more account than an army of Quiotas [probably coyotes] and didn't I smash 'em. Mexicans have no business in this country. I don't believe in them. The men were made to be shot at, and the women were made for our purposes. I'm a white man - I am! A Mexican is pretty near black. I hate all Mexicans." The causes and consequences of anti-Mexican nativism in California are analyzed in Richard H. Peterson, *Manifest Destiny in the Mines: A Cultural Interpretation of Anti-Mexican Nativism in California, 1848-1853* (San Francisco: R and E Publishers, 1988).

20J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, May 10, 1850, Panama City, CL, no. 5.

21Ibid.

22J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, June 6, 1850, San Francisco, CL, no. 6.

23J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, July 7, 1850, Salmon Falls, California, CL, no. 7; and George and Jan Roberts, *Discover Historic California* (Pico Rivera, California: Gem Guides Book Co., revised ed. 1990), 253.

24J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, July 7, 1850, Salmon Falls, no. 7.

25Ibid.

26Note later added to the conclusion of the July 7, 1850, letter in typescript copy.

27J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, August 10, 1850, Salmon Falls, CL, no. 8.

28J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, August 21, 1850, Salmon Falls, CL, no. 9.

29Ibid. A contrary view is expressed in a noted American history text which asserts that "most miners and lumbermen worked seventy hours a week and had no time, energy, or money for drinking, gambling, or gunfights." See Mary Beth Norton, et al, *A People and a Nation*, Brief 3rd ed., vol. B (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991), 295.

30J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, August 21, 1850, Salmon Falls, CL, no. 9.

31J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, October 3, 1850, Sacramento City, CL, no. 10. On the beginning, speculative nature, and evolution of river mining, especially on the American River, see Rodman W. Paul, *California Gold: The Beginning of Mining in the Far West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 60, 124-126, 128-130.

32J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, October 3, 1850, Sacramento City, CL, no. 10.

33Ibid.

34J. B. Chaffee to Respected Friends, October 28, 1850, Salmon Falls, CL, no. 11.

35J. B. Chaffee to My Dear Parents, December 7, 1850, Salmon Falls, CL, no. 12. In order to better understand Chaffee's concern about his health and longevity, see John E. Baur, "The

Health Factor in the Gold Rush Era," in *Rushing for Gold*, ed. by John W. Caughey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949); and Joan Margo, "The Food Supply Problem of the California Gold Mines, 1848-1855" (M. A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1947).

36J. B. Chaffee to My Dear Parents, December 7, 1850, Salmon Falls, no. 12.

37J. B. Chaffee to Dear Parents, January 28, 1851, Salmon Falls, no. 14.

38According to the admittedly suspect federal census of 1850, nearly 92.5 percent of the recorded California population was male. Even in 1859, it was estimated that in the mining districts there were six men for every woman. Others placed the ratio at ten to one. According to one observer, a considerable percentage of the women were "neither maids, wives, nor widows." See Paul, *California Gold*, 82 and footnote 23 on the same page.

39J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, February 14, 1851, San Francisco, no. 15. It is interesting to speculate if the arrival of Valentine's Day on February 14 prompted Chaffee's romantic request.

40J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, March 19, 1851, Salmon Falls, no. 16.

41J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, April 25, 1851, Salmon Falls, no. 17.

42In a sample of forty-six notably successful mining entrepreneurs from throughout the West in the late nineteenth century, seventeen were merchants and thirteen were bankers immediately before successful extensive participation in mining. "Where it was difficult to determine the dominant prior occupation of individuals who simultaneously held two or more jobs, several were listed. Combinations such as merchandising and banking, or freighting and merchandising frequently appear." See Richard H. Peterson, *The Bonanza Kings: The Social origins and Business Behavior of Western Mining Entrepreneurs, 1870-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 35-36.

43Joe to Respected Parents, June 24, 1851, Salmon Falls, no. 18.

44Ibid.

45Jos. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, July 24, 1851, Salmon Falls, no. 19.

46Ibid.

47Ibid.

48J. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, September 21, 1851, Salmon Falls, no. 20. For an excellent analysis of the saloon and saloonkeeper on the mining frontier, see Elliott West, *The Saloon on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

49Jos. B. Chaffee to Respected Parents, October 12, 1851, Salmon Falls, no. 21.

50Ibid.

51See *Statutes of California, 1850* (Sacramento, 1850), 230; and *Statutes of California, 1851* (Sacramento, 1851), 114. The latter law stated that "Negroes or persons having one half or more Negro blood" could not testify in cases "to which a white person is a party." For the struggles of blacks against discrimination, including the testimony law, in early California, see Rudolph M. Lapp, "Negro Rights Activities in Gold Rush

California," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 45 (March 1966): 3-20; and James A. Fisher, "the Struggle for Negro Testimony," *Southern California Quarterly* 51 (Fall 1969): 313-324.

⁵²On blacks in California, see Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). For the fate of the Californios, see Leonard M. Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). The Mexican experience in the early California mines is examined in M. Colette Standart, "The Sonoran Migration to California: 1848-1856," *Southern California Quarterly* 58 (Fall 1976): 333-358; Richard H. Morefield, "Mexicans in the California Mines, 1848-53," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 35 (March 1956): 37-46; and Richard H. Peterson, "Anti-Mexican Nativism in California, 1848-1853: A Study of Cultural Conflict," *Southern California Quarterly* 62 (Winter 1980): 309-328. On the Chinese, see Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Elmer Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939); "The Chinese in California," *California History* 57 (Spring 1978): special issue; and Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). On the exploitation and genocide of the California Indians, see James Rawls, *Indians of California: The Changing Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984) and "Gold Diggers: Indian Miners in the California Gold Rush," *California Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1976): 28-45; Sherburne F. Cook, *The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943, especially "The American Invasion, 1848-1870," in the 1976 paperback ed.); Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); George H. Phillips, *The Enduring Struggle: Indians in California History* (San Francisco: Boyd and Fraser, 1981); and Albert L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California-Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁵³Joe to Respected Parents, June 24, 1851, Salmon Falls, no. 18. I was unable to determine the identity of Elliott and Beebe mentioned in the above letter. They may well have been local boxers before the sport was legalized and professionalized in the late nineteenth century in this country.

⁵⁴Chaffee to Respected Parents, August 10, 1850, Salmon Falls, no. 8.

⁵⁵Rice, et al, *The Elusive Eden*, 181-182.

⁵⁶I was unable to locate Chaffee from October 1851 through April 1853, but it is presumed that he remained in California and spent the rest of the time on the journey home. Regarding his return, marriage, and life in New York, see an explanatory Note, unnumbered page, CL, and Sarah W. Martin (Chaffee's grand-daughter) to Mr. Hall, September 16, 1952, Binghamton, New York, CL.

⁵⁷Letter, Mary Carey, Reference Librarian, New York Historical Society, to author, November 9, 1990.

⁵⁸Sarah W. Martin to Mr. Hall, September 16, 1952, CL.

⁵⁹On the issue of due process and the legal profession in California, see Gordon M. Bakken, *Practicing Law in Frontier California* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), and Christian G. Fritz, *Federal Justice in California: The Court of Ogden Hoffman, 1851-1891* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). Much has been written about the vigilance movement with an emphasis on the San Francisco committees of 1851 and 1856. See, for example, Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Popular Tribunals*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: The History Co., 1887); Stanton A. Coblenz, *James King of William and Pioneer Justice in California* (New York: Barnes, 1961); William H. Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion: California, 1849-1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950); Richard Maxwell Brown, "Pivot of American Vigilantism: The San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1856," in John A. Carroll, ed., *Reflections of Western Historians* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1969), 105-119; United States Senate, *Executive Documents*, 34th Congress, 1st and 2nd sessions, vol. 15 (Washington, D.C., 1857) and 3rd session, vol. 7 (Washington, D.C., 1857); Peter R. Decker, *Fortunes and Failures: White-Collar Mobility in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 125-143; Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strains of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975; paper ed., 1977), chs. 4-6; Mary F. Williams, *History of the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance of 1851* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1921); John W. Caughey, *Their Majesties the Mob* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); and Robert M. Senkewicz, *Vigilantes in Gold Rush San Francisco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

⁶⁰For an insightful analysis of Dana's book and writing style, see James D. Hart, *American Images of Spanish California* (Berkeley: The Friends of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1960), 16-21.