Levi H. Faucett
"If hell lay to the west, Americans would cross heaven to get there," declared a popular saying in the United States during the early nineteenth century. After the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill on January 24, 1848, Forty-Niners were prepared to reverse the proverb and cross hell to get to California.

On March 21, 1850, Levi H. Faucett of Paoli, Orange County, Indiana, headed west, leaving behind his farm and his family: his pregnant wife, Louisa Stone Faucett; his four-year-old son, Henry; and a two-year-old son, Charles. Although his father, George Washington Faucett, Jr., had once been a minister who preached about heavenly streets of gold, Levi apparently was a believer in earthly treasures, and he did not go to search for them alone. Of George Faucett's immediate family, one son and the husbands of four of his eight daughters went to California. Louisa's brother, Lorenzo D. (Lee) Stone, also went with Levi, and the men wrote home from towns such as Whiskey Slide, Hang Town, Peppermint Gulch, and Murphy's Defeat that they had met several neighbors from Orange County. Among them were Joseph and Albert Hamilton, Logan Bradford, George Holaday, Samuel and Marley Clark, John Cather, and Wesley Johnson. All of these men, who once might have been satisfied with a crop of golden corn, were probably inspired to go west by the same sort of frenzy that seized a young man who spied the riches in the pack of a returning Forty-Niner.

...unbidden my legs performed some entirely new movements of polka steps—I took several—houses were too small for me to stay in--; I was soon in the streets in search of necessary outfits; piles of gold rose up before me at every step; castles of marble, dazzling the eye with their rich appliances... myriads of fair virgins contending for my love—were among the fancies of my fevered imagination. The Rothschilds, Girards, and Astors appeared to me but poor people; in short I had a very violent attack of gold fever.¹

¹Quoted in John Walton Caughey, The California Gold Rush (Berkeley, 1975), 22-23.
Unfortunately, none of the Faucett family returned to Indiana with the envisioned fortune, but several letters from Levi, and a few from two of his brothers-in-law, Joseph Rhoades and Lee Stone, reveal that the men did find aspects of life on the frontier rewarding. Levi's letters suggest that this thirty-seven-year-old farmer, much older than most Forty-Niners, considered the chance for adventure as enticing as the lure of gold. Until almost the end of his stay in California, the only wealth the family received from him was a growing packet of letters, rich in the details of life in the gold fields. The responses from his father and from his brother, Abel, make it increasingly clear that the Faucetts did not consider the letters satisfactory compensation for Levi's failure to remain in Indiana and support his wife and children. The family may well have agreed with one philosopher of the time who believed that participants in the gold rush were "temporarily or permanently escaping home responsibilities or expectations . . . ."

When Levi decided to go west in the spring of 1850, he could have gone by ship to Panama, made a five-day trip across the isthmus, and then taken passage on to California. Easterners, well acquainted with the sea, often chose that route if they could afford it. A ticket from New York City to San Francisco could cost as much as $300 for a cabin or $150 for steerage. Despite the expense, traveling by ship was a popular means of transportation because it was the fastest route to the gold fields—if the complicated connections went well and disease did not kill you on the way. When they arrived in Panama, sweating men "in India rubber and oilcloth suits . . . , armed with pistols, guns, knives, umbrellas, and life-preservers" negotiated with natives to take their "drinking-cups, pots, kettles, forks, spoons, and air-beds, with stores of meat, bread, brandy and pills" up the Chagres River in a dugout canoe. At the head of navigation travelers had to switch to pack animals for the remainder of the trip through the jungle to Panama City. One man recorded that the "howling of the monkeys & chattering of parrots" formed a chorus in the trees, while another wrote his wife about "groping through the forest, with my red shirt, straw hat & linen pants . . . covered with mud" from tropical downpours. Some never completed the journey across the isthmus because porters absconded with supplies or mosquitoes carrying yellow fever or malaria brought greater disaster. Even those who reached the port found a new challenge as space on ships headed for California became increasingly scarce. At one

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4 Quoted in Cauhey, California Gold Rush, 61.
5 Quoted in Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 59-60.
time seven hundred prospective passengers used bribery, ticket scal-
ing, and a lottery to compete for 250 berths. Fights ensued as every-
one was frantic to claim a space, afraid that the gold would be gone
before they arrived in the diggings.6

Those who were more familiar with the sea or more concerned
about disease chose to avoid Panama and sail around Cape Horn.
The trip of approximately eighteen thousand nautical miles could
take up to eight months, a definite disadvantage to those eager to
get to the gold fields. To work their way south, many ships sailed so
far east that their decks and spars were coated with red dust from
Africa. As men shivered in the Antarctic cold and sampled goonie
birds, gulls, and albatross, ships could take from a week to forty days
just to round the Horn, depending on the weather. For captains who
tried to shorten the journey by sailing through the Straits of Magel-
lan, a sudden storm might drive the vessel aground on shores where
natives were not always friendly.7

Whether one chose to round Cape Horn or brave the dangers
of Panama, traveling by sea presented risks that midwesterner Levi
Faucett might not have been prepared to take, especially if he had
heard of incidents such as the 223 passengers lost when the Golden
Gate caught fire at sea or the grounding of the Union two hundred
miles south of San Diego on July 5 because its helmsman had cele-
brated with too much whiskey on the Fourth of July.8 Besides, Levi
was already in Paoli and probably would have considered it a waste
of precious time to reach the West by going east.

Like many of the Forty-Niners, Faucett was a farmer. He already
had oxen and could buy a vehicle from his brother, who was a wag-
onmaker. Several books, newspapers, and lecturers offered infor-
mation and advice to men who were headed to the gold fields. Levi
might well have purchased a book by Sidney Roberts entitled To
Emigrants to the Gold Region: A Treatise, Showing the Best Way to
California or for twenty-five cents read the eighty pages of The Gold
Regions of California by G. G. Foster. Men in Paris ordered the
Manuel des emigrants de Californie, those in Leipzig devoured Das
Goldland Kalifornien, gentlemen in London perused The Gold-Seek-
er's Manual, and "mates" in Sydney studied The Digger's Handbook.9

More likely Levi read an article in the Louisville Courier that
explained the various land routes to California and gave advice on
the supplies needed for the trip. The newspaper recommended that
each person take one hundred fifty pounds of flour and the same
amount of bacon, twenty-five pounds of coffee, thirty of sugar, fifty
to seventy-five of crackers, and varying amounts of rice, dried fruit,

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7Ibid., 77-86.
8Ibid., 74.
9Ibid., 50-55.
lard, salt, and pepper. Many of these items were staples readily available in a farm community. A group similar to Levi's also carried eight to ten hams, four pounds of tea, and one keg each of vinegar, pickles, and brandy. Additional supplies might include three pounds of rough nails, forty feet of rope, ten pounds of soap, ten pounds of gunpowder, two thousand percussion caps, one quart of #6 shot, one gallon of tar, one quart of turpentine, two camp kettles, three water buckets, paper, pins, spools of thread, pens, and a bottle of ink.

The gunpowder and brandy served two purposes because both were popular medicines on the trail west. Gunpowder was a favorite treatment for cholera, the disease that most often struck those crossing the prairie, and brandy obviously could be used for medicinal purposes. Some groups also carried in their medicine chests one-half pound of ginger, one-half ounce of quinine, three pounds of soda, one quart of liniment, two ounces of ammonia, one pint of castor oil, and two ounces of opium. All of these would be needed if cholera struck, and one traveler came to realize that "instead of turning up the golden sands of the Sacramento, the spade of the adventurer was first used to bury the remains of a companion." Members of a New York group who left home young and eager described how one of their company, a victim of cholera, vomited so intensively that the veins in his face burst, "his broad forehead . . . marked with the blue and purple streaks of blood that stood under the skin and down both sides of the nose . . ." It was considered a blessing if the patient took only two days to die. Even at the end of the journey, one in five of the young miners died within six months of their arrival in California. The mortality rate was so high from violence and disease that life insurance companies refused to write policies for Californians and raised the premiums for those already covered.

While Faucett did not record what medicine or other supplies he took from Orange County, he carried them by riverboat on the first part of the trip. In a letter to Louisa on April 24, 1850, Levi wrote:

we Shiped for St. Louis at N. Albany on the 21st of March and landed at St Louis on the 24th of the same month and after we had binn thier one day and night . . . we left on bord the Duroc for St. Joseph the 28th and that night we lost one of the Carter oxen overboard and the captin refused to pay us for him and we refused to pay him our pasage and at length we compromised the matter and he paid us ten dollars for the Steer and we paid our pasage to St Joseph . . . [.]
In a note to his father from St. Louis on March 26, 1850, Levi told him, “It will cost us about one hundred dollars to get from Albany to St. Joseph We will get their [St. Joseph] in about five [more] days if no bad luck.” In his April letter to his wife, Levi stated that his health had “binn tolerable good since I left and I am in good spirits . . . .” He was especially pleased because gossip said that “the news is flatering from the mines.”

By May 5, 1850, when he began a running letter home, Levi had advanced from St. Joseph to a Catholic mission on the Kansas River. Although he did not mention it, he probably had to pay the usual toll of five dollars for a wagon and fifty cents for oxen to cross the Missouri River at St. Joseph. A year earlier, in May of 1849, approximately ten thousand had made that crossing. Only two ferries were available, and fights broke out as hundreds of wagons jockeyed for position in line. Challenges were issued and men were killed over the right to be first aboard the dirty and decidedly unseaworthy Missouri scows.

As did many Forty-Niners, Levi’s party formed a company of wagons traveling together, and Levi was elected sergeant. These quasi-military groups selected leaders who would choose campsites or establish a rotation for standing watch. One New York doctor reportedly found himself taking orders from his former coachman. A few groups were joint stock ventures bankrolled by eastern merchants who preferred to hire proxies to do their digging. Desperate for funding, even Notre Dame University sent four Holy Cross brothers and three laymen to search for a golden endowment.

Despite all the study, planning, and organization, the first few days on the trail were always difficult because of inexperienced drivers, unbroken teams, and poorly balanced loads. Stampedes were frequent, as Levi soon discovered. “May the 6th had a Stamped all the teams but ours and Mahans run I hapened to be cloase by ours and cetch the leader by the horn & bow of the Yoak and dubled them round no damage traveled about four miles and had a nother Stamped . . . .” By May 15 three of the wagons in Faucett’s group had turned back, and there were only five wagons and nineteen men remaining in the party. Levi described an increased feeling of isolation, but it lasted only until May 20 when the group arrived at the Platt River. “I expect there is five hundred wagons in this bottom,” he wrote. Another Forty-Niner who reached this point in his journey west was not as pleased to see so many people. Both banks were lined with “a solid mass of wagon,” he related, and “men digging graves on each side of the river; men dying in their wagons, halloo-

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19 Marks, *Precious Dust*, 22-23.
ing and crying and cramping with the cholera, women screaming and hallooing and praying.” If Levi saw such a sight, he did not mention it to his wife, possibly for her peace of mind. On May 22, twelve miles east of Fort Kearney, the group met an express rider, and Levi sent his letter on its way “to the States.”

Two weeks later, on June 5, 1850, Faucett wrote to his parents from “18 miles below Fort Laramie” and approximately three hundred miles west of Fort Kearney. He told them that since he had “nothing of very great importance to write to you I will give you a short sketch of our travels from Fort Kearney to this place.” He wrote of a Sioux village they had passed, which had two hundred to three hundred “wigwams,” and commented that Court House Rock resembled the statehouse in Jefferson City. He explained that he had not gone with friends to see Chimney Rock because he was “almost wore out walking.” Levi had been struggling through deep sand all day and stated that if he got rich enough in California he would purchase a horse. (Although Faucett did not know it at the time, he would have had to be very rich because just renting a horse in California cost eight dollars a day.) The next morning others were walking with him because during the night a hailstorm had driven off a number of mules from a camp near Scotts Bluff. When his party arrived at Fort Laramie on June 6, Faucett saw evidence that thousands were moving west. He explained to his parents that he had gone
to the office and registered our names. There had passed the Fort up to last night June the 6th 12,988 men [,] 147 Woman[,] 128 children, 3625 Wagons, 12000 Horses, 3627 mules, 4636 Oxen, 561 cows, They make out a list every night of what has passed thru, emigrants are going in every way amenable I even saw an old man and a little boy about eight or ten years old packing across afoot. It is astonishing to see the property that is thrown away the road is strewn with Wagons & wagon irons, trunks, Gun barrels, log chains, old cloaths, Boots & Shoes, cooking stoves, tin pans &c &c.

Levi told his parents that the only problem he had was a lack of flour, a need he hoped to remedy at a Mormon community. He stated that he expected to be in California by the first of August. In closing, Faucett reminded his mother and father “to be certain to attend to my affairs” back home.

The next letter Levi sent to Indiana was mailed on August 25, 1850, from Hang Town, California. After apologizing to Louisa for the long delay in writing, Faucett assured his wife that he missed her, the children, and peach cobbler. The thought of food was not surprising considering that he “was weighed to day and onley weigh 150 lbs before I left home my weight was 184 lbs so you see I have lost 34 lbs in weight and I do not think I ever will be as Stought as I was.” John Osborn, a family friend who wrote to George Faucett about a similar trip to Oregon in 1851, related that the grass was

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20 Quoted in ibid., 56.
21 Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 130.
scarce and water bad. "I cannot say much about the suffering on the California road but I am shure language must fail to describe it . . . there was sickness and death to be witnessed in many forms and on the latter end of the road there was a great many of the emigrants suffered for the want of provisions . . . ." Thirst often tormented the travelers, and one reported that "tongues would be swollen, our lips crack, and a crust would form on our tongue that could not be
Insects came "by legion" and wasps sometimes colonized tent canvases in such numbers that they either "multiplied incredibly, or else gathered recruits from all directions . . . ." Bitten or stung faces swelled until individuals could barely see. The sun blinded, hailstones pummeled, and lightning set prairie fires around the camps.

Even simple, daily tasks such as cooking and sewing were a challenge on the trail, and one man wrote that there was "a heightened sensitivity to the arduousness of women's work." The Forty-Niners struggled to repair irreplaceable shirts and trousers and gathered buffalo chips to fuel their cooking fires. Until they learned the real art of preparing food over an open campfire, the men must have eaten many scorched meals. Washing clothes was considered the hardest chore, and one fellow was delighted when he returned to the stream where he was doing his laundry to find that his clothes had floated away in the current. Many men resolved the laundry situation by never changing clothes from the time they left home until the time they reached California.

From the gold fields Levi's first letter to Louisa closed with what would become his standard advice: "do the best you can until I return . . . ." Unfortunately, none of her letters survive so it is difficult to gauge her reaction to his absence. Her feelings may well have been similar to those of Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie) Wilson, her sisters, Annie and Charlotte, and brother, Jamie, when their father, James Wilson, Jr., of Keene, New Hampshire, suddenly went west. The former congressman left the young people, three of whom were teenagers, to deal with foreclosure notices and a mountain of debts that it would take a gold strike to pay. Only six months after his departure, Annie wrote to Wilson that Lizzie had "grown older, and actually sick, since you left us, and really seems to droop under it all." Later Lizzie told her father that "anxieties and troubles have nearly destroyed us."

In a January 13, 1851, letter to his son, George reported that it had been necessary for Louisa to sell most of the farm stock because she could no longer care for it. Since she had fired the latest hired hand, "an unprincipled scamp," only she and the children were left on the farm. George assured Levi that Louisa had worked hard to keep everything in order but acknowledged that she had

truly had a hard time since you left . . . there is not any Person on the Place but her and the Children. She keeps the Child Tied in its little Chair before the Stove, & we are afraid every day that the little Fellows will burn up the house[,] themselves in it, while their Mother is attending to the Stock. I have went down nearly every week to

22 Quoted in Marks, Precious Dust, 64-65.
24 Marks, Precious Dust, 67.
see how she is getting along. We killed on Christmas day 6 hoggs for her they weighed 1000 lbs, I salted it for her & all is doing well there is nothing lacking but you on the farm

In a letter written on November 9, 1851, about eighteen months after his son's departure for California, George reported that Louisa had sold six of their hogs, leaving ten, “& them is enough for her to attend [attend] to, she carryes all the water up into the Corner of the Clover field from the river, about 8 Buckets per day, She also carryes all that they use at the house from the river, the spring has not run any in Four months[.]” Another man who had been hired to help her on the farm

Says he cant stay with Louisa any longer than he gets the corn gathered So you can understand that she will have another Lonesom Hard winter . . . She suffered last winter by having no fire only what was in the stove, She now has the Stove set to one side of the fire Place & keeps a Fire in the harth, I will now say to you that she has done all that she was able to do, to keep every thing in its Propper Place, in a word she has got along first rate, & all without a murmer[.]

Levi’s father also reported in the November letter that twelve window panes were broken in Louisa’s house, the roof on the barn was leaking, and the fences were falling down; however, Levi probably read and reread only the section in which George reported that “Azer Wilson got home [from California] the 12th day of July, I think he brot about $5,000, he is working as hard in the shop as if he had not one dollar, he made his pile on feather river. When he first went there he made gold very slow, but his luck became more favorable and he made a pretty smart fortune and then come home.”

Although inspired by such stories and excited by the journey, Levi, at least at first, often thought about events back home. His letters are full of references to the wheat crop, orders for the hired hands, and complaints about not hearing from Louisa. “I cannot give you any instructions [about the farm] until I hear from you,” he wrote. Despite that statement, he told her, perhaps in response to his father’s comment about the stove and hearth, to “keep things in good order and be careful with fire as the barn is so close to the house.” When he learned that a hired man was getting married, Levi assumed that he would “still attend to my business[.] If he does not however you will do the best you can as I cannot say what would be best—I was in hopes I would be able to send you some money by this time but my chances has been bad[.]” He could not send her funds, he said, because “I fear I shall not have anuff to take us to the southern mines. As soon as I get some to spair I will send you a draft, probably not untill next Spring.”

Levi explained repeatedly to the struggling Louisa that he also could not provide any support because of the high cost of living in “the diggings.” He informed her in a letter from Sacramento that he had to pay sixteen dollars a week for his “bord” in a place so filthy that he was “eat up with the flies at night.” Although Faucett did
not single out food prices, a fellow miner recorded that he and his partner paid forty-three dollars for a breakfast of a box of sardines, some hard bread, butter, cheese, and two bottles of ale. In an area where fresh fruit was scarce, miners paid one dollar for unripened pears hanging on a tree in Coloma. “The purchaser would select his fruit, tag it with his name, and wait hopefully for it to mature.” Given a choice between a bag of gold and a basket of apples sitting on a rock, thieves in the California gold fields almost always chose the food.

In addition to the high cost of living, Faucett reported to his wife that “the miners [were] making no more than . . . three to five dollars per day.” The largest nugget he himself had found “weighed nineteen dollars.” He informed Louisa that he no longer wanted to “accumulate great wealth” but just wanted “a nuff gold to enable me to clear myself of debt and I suppose I shall have to stay a way from home about two years from present.” Faucett acknowledged that he could probably go into business and make about one hundred dollars a month. Levi Strauss, who did so, accumulated a fortune selling jeans, while Philip Armour started his meat-packing empire with a butcher shop in a mining camp. Others accumulated wealth by providing the miners with “necessities,” such as liquor, tobacco, gambling, and prostitutes. The Indiana farmer decided that he could not open a business in a “place where so much vice and wickedness prevail.” Faucett somehow rationalized that it was more acceptable to live where “heaps upon heaps of money [are] piled up on the gambling tables . . . every night” if he were mining for gold.

Levi refused to give up and go home. On November 24, 1850, he wrote his father, “You can see from this that I have made nothing hear since I have bin in California. If I do not make money anuff between this and next Spring to take me home and pay my debts I shall stay until next fall and then come home if I only have money anuff to take me. I want you to tell my creditors to be patient—I may be one of the lucky ones this winter.” On January 13, 1851, George responded, “We are Sorrow that you have made nothing yet, & that your Prospects are not Flatering, We are in great hopes that you will come home in the Spring, I will say to you, that if you only have enough to Bare your expenses home come, & there is no danger but you can soon make enough to Pay your debts, I see nothing that is flatering from Calefornia to induce any man to Stay there.” Pride and a gambler’s optimism probably kept Levi and the others digging in the gold fields. When Lucius Fairchild’s parents urged the young Forty-Niner to return, he responded, “Just think to have it said that Lush [Lucius] come home with out making anything and those Mutton Headed

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26 Caughrey, California Gold Rush, 35.
27 Quoted in Marks, Precious Dust, 176.
28 Ibid., 177.
29 Ibid., 197.
B-Boys made a pile. You would be ashamed of my self so I am bound to have the pile if possible."30 Both Faucett and Fairchild would undoubtedly have agreed with another miner who wrote his family that to keep his "manly self-respect," he had to continue searching.31

The correspondence from California grew as more and more family members went west. People in Indiana who received the letters frequently exchanged the information they contained. On October 21, 1850, Levi wrote Louisa from Sacramento that he had located county friends, Joseph and Albert Hamilton, and "was surprised to see them nothing but skin and bones." He included the information that old Mr. Hamilton and Duncan Dicky were both "dead with Erisipelas. . . poor felows such a long way from thear famileys." Since Levi included the information that Joseph had not yet notified the Hamilton family, Louisa had the additional responsibility of informing them. When he learned that a friend was considering coming west, Faucett, who refused to return home, must have bemused Louisa by asking her to tell the man to stay in Indiana "if he loves comfort and good society."

Levi acknowledged that he did have a great deal of company at the celebration of California statehood in Sacramento. He described for his wife the fireworks and the speeches praising Henry Clay but added that "There is more dissadisfied in California now than ever I saw any whare[.] Some cursing the country others the people that wrote back some them selves for being such foolls for ever coming &c&c." About the same time another miner wrote an eastern friend that "instead of being a blessing [California] will prove a curse to the Union . . . . You can form no adequate idea of the depths of sin and moral degredation to which most of the people are sunk or rather sink themselves . . . ." One town had seventeen murders in a week, and over a period of five years Nevada County averaged eighty-three homicides per one hundred thousand people. Gambling was a popular diversion that often accompanied the violence as miners bet on everything, including the survival chances of a shooting victim as he underwent surgery on a pool table. Alcoholism was rampant, and travelers commented that whiskey bottles littered the state's roads and trails. Such drinking made men who wore filthy clothes, stood in cold water all day, and lived on an inadequate diet even more vulnerable to disease. The lonely miners added to that health risk by paying up to four hundred dollars a night for the services of the prostitutes who worked the camps. In fact, dissipation was so common that a Forty-Niner named George McCowen complained that if a man did not have bad habits such as drinking, gambling, or chewing tobacco, he was considered "little short of an outlaw." McCowen decided

30 Quoted in ibid., 327.
31 Ibid., 155.
to take up smoking so he could fit in and avoid trouble. As Levi moved about the state, he described conditions so primitive and dangerous that even peaceful farmers began to carry revolvers and bowie knives.

While high prices, the failure of his search for gold, and the presence of flagrant immorality could not persuade Levi to leave the new state and return east, the mere rumor that there was "cholary in this city" certainly convinced him to leave Sacramento. On November 24, 1850, Levi informed his father that he had departed on October 25 and traveled about one hundred miles to Calaveras County. With winter approaching he joined a group cutting logs to build a 14-by-18-foot cabin. Once it was completed, Levi purchased thirteen feet of lumber at 37 cents per foot, made a "gold washer" or cradle, and, with a friend, commenced mining for gold. They "worked all week hard and only made thirty dollars." A group of twenty-seven men who had dug a twelve-foot-deep trench nearby made even less. All were concerned about their ability to live in the area where one hundred pounds of flour cost twenty to twenty-four dollars, tea was three dollars a pound, and those who preferred to drink coffee paid one dollar per pound. While the climate was much healthier than in the cholera-ridden cities, Levi reported that the rainy season had set in and that he expected rain every day for three or four months. By January 28, 1851, he was so discouraged that he left for Placerville and in February moved on to "Grizley Kanyon," near the north fork of the American River. When he and the Cathers, friends from Orange County, "commenced digging on a spot about ten feet that was never dug over . . . we got $400 out in a few days . . . our prospects are tolerable good at present." Despite the discovery, a deep snow forced them to seek shelter, and the cost of living soon ate up their profits. The strike proved to be a small one, and, in May, 1851, Levi moved on to Nevada City. It was the fifth relocation he had made since arriving in California the previous year. When Faucett complained to his family about the lack of letters, his father responded that "when you did tell us where to direct [a letter], you would be gone before [it] could get there."

All of the miners were eager for mail and often stood in line at the post office in Sacramento from the time it opened at 8:00 a.m. until it closed twelve hours later. There was a delivery window for every letter of the alphabet, and the line for each window stretched out of sight. Individuals near the front when the facility closed for the night simply sat down and waited for it to open the next morning. Food vendors supplied the crowds, and miners who had been weakened by illness or injury earned money by waiting in line and then selling their place to the highest bidder when they neared the front. If Levi

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22 Courtwright, "Violence in America," 42-44, quotations on 42.
ever stood in the “F” line, his wait was unrewarded because of the eight letters that Louisa wrote to her husband not one ever reached its destination. A miner who had a similar experience commented that he would “cheerfully pay 100 dollars for a Letter from Home.”

Although he had not heard from his wife, Levi discovered in Nevada City a way to get some news about events in Indiana. He went to work for a company that was hiring twenty to twenty-five miners to conduct a large sluicing operation; Samuel and Marley Clark and John Cather from Orange County were also employed there. On May 4, 1851, Levi described for Louisa the bunk that he and John were sharing: “some clabboards laid on two poals and two blankets under us and two to cover us.” He assured his wife that “I have got so I can rest sweetly in that way although it went verry hard with me at first.” Levi called the area “the richest mining region of country I have bin in.” He described it as “full of Gold.” He told Louisa that the men who owned the company were two ministers: John Thompson, “a baptist and a fine mason from Misouri,” and Johnathan Phelps, “a universelast from N. Hampshire.” On Sundays the partners would share a pulpit, and the miners attended in great numbers. On one occasion there were even fifteen to twenty ladies present, which caused great comment. Levi wrote to Louisa that he had heard a “sermint” by Rev. Isaac Owens who “gave his brethren a severe thrashing for Sabbath braeking, dealing in ardent spirrits, etc, and concluded by asking his brethren and all to untie there gold bags and the stuards would wait on them with a plate for them to pass in the dust—liberally.” Earlier, Faucett had stayed in Coloma for a period of time and might have heard a preacher-prospector in that town tell his congregation, “There will be divine service in this house next Sabbath—if, in the meantime, I hear of no new diggings.”

Levi was excited about working for Thompson and Phelps and may have offended his family when he wrote that he wished he “could be with you all a few days and then back here again I am bound to make six or eight hundred dollars before I go home . . . .” Faucett stayed with the preachers for one month, until June 6, 1851, when he used all the money he had earned to purchase a claim, two hundred feet of the “Kentucky Flat.” He explained to Louisa on July 7, 1851, that “on this flat they have binn and are yet taking out large amounts of coarse gold pieces weighing from two bits up to two hundred Dollars we have not got a piece larger than sixteen Dollars yet we have done tolerable well so far it is butiful gold we get.” Levi had gone into partnership with three men from New York and was doing the cooking for the group while they worked the claim. The next letter, dated September 7, 1851, came from Union City, California, and

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33 Marks, Precious Dust, 309.
34 Ibid., 227.
LEVI FAUCETT TO HIS WIFE LOUISA, SEPTEMBER 7, 1851

Letter in author's possession
Paoli and Placerville

made no further mention of his New York partners or the claim on Kentucky Flat. This letter stated that he had hired himself out for $135 per month to perform an undefined task and had enough savings that he could offer to send Louisa “a check for two or three hundred dollars . . . if you stand in need of money . . . .” It would have been the first financial support she had received from her husband since he had left home eighteen months earlier. Perhaps the offer of the money was intended to counterbalance the news that he was not coming home that fall. In a letter addressed to “Louisa Faucett God bless her,” Levi told his wife that “there is no one in California that has a stronger desire to be with their companyon children and friends than I have, yet I cannot think of going home now to count two years of my life a blank . . . .”

Levi’s brother, Abel, definitely considered the time in California a waste. On December 21, 1851, he wrote to their parents, “I was glad to hear from our California friends . . . that they had sent some money home to their famileys & creditors as I think they had been gone about long enough for to begin to make something. Most any good hand could do as well down on the Mississippi river cutting cord wood.” Abel told his father, who had been pressing hard for Levi’s return, to “make your mind easy in refference to the boyes in California all we can say does but little good and may do much harm in coming years . . . . They are young and may profet by the lesson.”

Levi certainly had not profited monetarily before his next letter home, which was dated October 26, 1851. He had returned to Nevada City, but this time he was working his own claim, bringing in about four dollars a day. The sluicing effort begun by Thompson and Phelps had ended the previous July when the stream went dry. As a fellow minister, George had asked to be remembered to the Baptist preacher, but Levi sent word to his father that Thompson had gone the way of all the earth on the next morning after I came up here the news came into town that Thompson was found that morning in his cabin by the Side of his bunk with his brains blown out it appears as if he had awoke in the night and turned the blankets back and Slpt out and reached up and got his gun and Shot himself, he fell back under his bunk and the gun lay across his legs no one knows what caused him to put an end to his days.

This October, 1851, letter closed with the usual requests to his wife that she write often, extend his love to his family, and remember that “I remain your husband until death.” It was the last she heard from him for almost six months, until a rather stilted communication, dated March 1, 1852, arrived from Sacramento. Although the letter does not state how he did so, Levi had managed to amass a considerable sum of money. It noted that he had sent a check for $300 to his father to begin payments to his creditors and was enclosing in this letter to his wife $350 for her to give George to apply on other debts. For the first time Levi no longer asked her to write, made no reference to his expected return, and extended only his best
wishes “for yours and the children's welfare.” He even omitted the
now-hollow encouragement to do the best she could. This letter
appears to be the last Louisa ever received from California.
Levi's formality in this final letter could have been in reaction
to his family's mounting anger over his continuing absence. The
money he enclosed was perhaps an effort to prove to them, and him-
self, that he was not a failure. During the previous months George
Faucett had become ill and in his letters to his son was increasingly
critical of Levi's neglect of his family. Throughout the series of let-
ters George's sympathies were always with Louisa. A few days after
his son-in-law Enoch Millis left for California in 1853, George took
his daughter Lydia to "Lawyer Pain" to file for divorce. It is probable
that Louisa's experiences influenced her father-in-law's actions.
As for Abel, the brother who remained at home had nothing but dis-
dain for the "boy" in California who was approaching forty and had
so little to show for his efforts. Because of her missing letters, Louisa
is the silent participant; but it is hard to imagine that she did not
experience increasing resentment over having to bear the burden of
farm and family without any moral or much monetary support from
her husband. Lizzie Wilson may have spoken for such women when
she wrote to her father,

Eight years ago on the twelfth of September I stood on the wharf at New York... and saw you leaving... The feeling of gloom and despondency which settled down on my heart then comes on me again tonight as I remember it... Since then a veil has fallen between you and me... I used to know something of what you meant, but now I know nothing of you. I ask for an explanation. You never give it. I write to you begging for a reply. You never make it... You write of everything else... but not what I want to know [when he was coming home].\[35\]

Whatever Louisa's trials, her husband's remedy was always "do the
best you can." The words eventually must have evoked in her the
thought that she probably could have done a lot better than Levi.
Whatever the cause, the correspondence ceased. Although Levi
returned to Paoli in time to father Alice Faucett (Rhodes), who was
born in 1855, the pile of fading letters suggests that gold fever and
the years of separation cost the Faucett family far more than it ever
gained. If there was continuing discord, it must have gradually faded
from memory, or gold fever was contagious. In the 1890s Levi's and
Louisa's son, Charles, joined the gold rush to Alaska. There he was
reportedly murdered while defending the rich strike that had elud-
ed his father forty years earlier.

\[35\] Quoted in Heffernan and Stecker, *Sisters of Fortune*, 4.