California! In the 1850s adventurous young men east of the Mississippi River immediately associated this word with visions of gold strewn valleys and mountains. Nuggets covered the ground; riches were there for the taking. For these dreamers El Dorado lay just west of the Rocky Mountains. Soon, however, disillusioning news filtered back east to dispel the popular mythology about California. The gold rush eventually became more rush than gold.

The following letters of Ephraim Thompson reflect this disenchantment with California's gold. Born on a farm in Daviess County, near Washington, Indiana, Thompson left home with several friends late in 1853 to seek his fortune in the West. His letters vividly describe his journey to California via a land-water route across Nicaragua, mining techniques in the Golden State, and life in the gold fields.

Why Thompson chose to take a boat from Evansville down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, thence to the Nicaraguan isthmus and finally via the Pacific Ocean to California he does not say. The overland route across the United States took longer, and, perhaps, a cholera epidemic that swept the Great Plains in 1852 influenced his decision. In addition, attractive broadsides put out by the Nicaraguan Steamship Company, advertising their service to be the "Shortest, Quickest and Healthiest Route," possibly impressed Thompson. In any case the young Hoosier found little beauty in the Mississippi River towns. Cairo, Illinois, and Memphis, Tennessee, could not compare with Evansville in his estimation. Only the rural charm of Natchez, Mississippi, appealed to him, and this was due to the numerous evergreens and sugar plantations that surrounded the city. But slavery, Thompson wrote, was the "one thing" that spoiled "all the beauty of the South."

From New Orleans Thompson traveled to Nicaragua, then across to the Pacific. The popularity of the Panama passage had led to high prices and...

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2 E. A. Wiltsee, Gold Rush Steamers (San Francisco, 1938), 132.
poor service. Thus, in 1851, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt established a competitive alternate route through Nicaragua. Steamers from New Orleans wound up the San Juan River to Lake Nicaragua. There, travelers disembarked and hiked about seventeen miles to San Juan del Sur, a port on the Pacific. Thompson was not sold on the Central American country. He became seasick on the voyage from New Orleans and saw little beauty in Nicaragua’s alligators, marshy vegetation, and shallow rivers. Unfortunately, he wrote nothing more on the efficiency of the commodore’s operations; for shortly after Thompson journeyed across Nicaragua, William Walker's filibustering expedition in that country ended the route's popularity.

Twenty-four days after leaving New Orleans Thompson landed in California. In 1854 San Francisco was a new city, having rebuilt after the great fire of June, 1851. The town was “about as large as New Albany [Indiana] and not very well built up at that,” Thompson observed. He added that there was enough gold on the gaming tables “to buy Daviess County.” But hard work, not gambling, had been taught at home; and he headed into the mountains to the goldfields around Marysville, California.

Marysville, eighty miles above Sacramento, was nestled between the Feather and Yuba rivers in the heart of the gold region. Named for Mary Covillard, the wife of a prominent promoter and land speculator, Marysville, one observer had noted in 1850, contained “the hardest set of ’hombres’ . . . in this country. Every night gambling, drinking, fighting and shooting are carried on to a great extent.” Thompson found a similar situation four years later. He told his father that the gold region was “a hard place to do Wright. gaming and drinking are Virtues here but I Shun both as I would a Serpent.”

Gold prospecting proved as rough as the Marysville citizens. Thompson found that one did not simply pick nuggets off the ground and that placer mining, which involved digging a claim and then washing the gold from the “diggins” by means of water brought down the hillside through a flume,

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4 Caughey, *Gold Is the Cornerstone*, 72.


6 Thompson’s judgment was somewhat off in estimating the size of San Francisco. New Albany boasted a population of 9,895 in 1850. Although San Francisco’s returns for 1850 were destroyed by fire, by 1860 56,802 claimed residence there. One writer estimates the population in 1852 to have been 36,000. See *The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, cxxiii, ci; *The Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, 1, 31; Roske, *Everyman’s Eden*, 248.

7 Katherine A. White (comp.), *A Yankee Trader in the Gold Rush: The Letters of Franklin A. Buck* (Boston, 1930), 60-61. Another observer reported that ‘Marysville . . . was still ‘a little town, built mostly of canvas,’ in 1851. Three years later it, too, was ‘a large city,’ with ‘blocks of brick, fire-proof buildings.’ In 1851 Marysville had but two brick buildings; in the next year, seventeen; in 1853, thirty-nine; in 1854, forty-three; and in 1855, fifty-four.” Rodman W. Paul, *California Gold: The Beginning of Mining in the Far West* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), 74.
MARYSVILLE: VIEW FROM THE NORTH SIDE OF THE PLAZA

was impossible in the northern California mountains. Ice and heavy snow falls easily discouraged this method of mining. Thompson and other Daviess County youths in California tried their hand at various jobs. One roamed the countryside taking daguerrotypes, another ran a ferry on the Yuba River, and two others raised livestock to provision the miners. Thompson sought work as a clerk but confided to his brother that “you might as well go to the Moon as California” for that type of job. And mining, he noted to his father, was “the hardest work that Mortal man ever done.” Farming was “fun” by comparison.

Thompson grew progressively more discouraged with each letter home. On February 1, 1854, he decided he could never settle in California and would try to earn enough money to leave within two years. By May he was checking the steamers going east even though he had finally landed a job as a clerk. By July Thompson warned his brother to give up any notion of coming to California. “Before leaving home,” he advised, California “Seems like a golden dream. where a feller dont wake up untill he finds himself out of money and digging in mud and watter to make enough to buy Gr[u]b.” It was better to stay in Indiana, he concluded.

Within the year Thompson raised enough money to return to Daviess County where he entered the general merchandise business with his brother, Joseph. Later he operated a carpet store and served as president of the Washington (Indiana) National Bank from 1885 to 1897. After an illness of two years, Thompson died of cancer in 1906. In his gold rush letters he wrote a vivid description of his own experiences, perhaps hoping that they might serve as a deterrent to other young men who had not “stopped bu[i]lding Castles in the air.” Yet, in spite of the difficulties young men faced in California, the letters reveal that a surprisingly large number of Daviess County youths tried their luck prospecting. Unfortunately, no contemporary accounts disclose the number of Hoosiers who did trek west, but Thompson’s letters hint that many did so and preserve the color and hardships of the California mining camps in the 1850s.

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8 Daviess County Democrat, August 25, 1906.
My Dear Mother

I have delayed writing until this time because we did not know when we would leave this place until yesterday evening. We leave on next Wednesday morning at eight o'clock on the steam ship *Pambrero* via Nicaragua. We all go in the second cabin except William & James Duncan. They take first cabin on this side of the isthmus and second on the other side. The second cabin is about as good as the first, all the difference is that you don't have a state room and that is not much difference for there is 6 berths in one state room.

Our passage for 2d cabin is one hundred and fifty dollars. In the first 225$, first on this side and 2d on the other 160$ steerage 100$. Mc and Wm went to see the ship the other day; it looks like a very cluttered up place after being on a large steam boat. The 2d cabin is below the first and the Captn told us that it was cooler there than in the first being below the water line. We came down on the *Mary Agnes* from Evansville and arrived here on the 30th Nov. We have put up at the Commercial Hotel.

In coming down the river I was a little disappointed. I expected to see some fine cities but there is not one as pretty as Evansville on the whole river except Natchez. Cairo is a low flat place and only a few houses there. Memphis is a good business place, but is not pretty at all. But Natchez is a beautiful place; it is on a very high hill and the edge of the bank is studded along with beautiful evergreens. The sugar plantations are just in there prime; the sugar cane looks like green corn in the drill. It is cultivated in the same manner. The juice tastes just like the juice of green corn stalk. There is one thing that spoils all the beauty of the South; that is slavery. They look like they were well fed but the grown ones do not look any more

1 In editing these letters an effort has been made to maintain, as closely as possible, the flavor imparted to them by Thompson's own spelling, grammar, punctuation, and style. Thus, lapses in spelling and grammar have been retained as long as the meaning remained clear. Thompson often dropped letters from words; these missing letters have been added only where clarity dictated. In a few instances words and punctuation marks have also been added in brackets to clarify meaning. The occasional use of a capital letter in the middle of a sentence has been maintained. Where no punctuation occurs at the end of a sentence, Thompson occasionally left a space. These spaces have also been maintained. However, in those cases where it has been impossible to determine which mark was intended, modern usage has prevailed. Raised letters have been lowered to the line. Paragraphing has been standardized as has spacing on headings, salutations, and closings. Obviously unintentional repetitions have been omitted. Some decisions regarding punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, spelling, and sentence structure were necessarily arbitrary. Efforts to identify the people mentioned in the letters have been unsuccessful.

2 These are first class and second class accommodations.
in coming down the river I was a little disappointed I expected to see some fine cities but there is not one as pretty as Evansville on the Wabash River except Nashville. There is a low flat place and only a few houses there. Memphis is a good business place but is not pretty at all. But Nashville is a beautiful place it is on a very high hill and the edge of the Bank is situated along with magnificent view-points. The sugar plantations are just in these frames the sugar cane looks like ever corn in the drill it is lintelled in the same manner the juice tastes just like the juice of green corn. Nashville there is one thing that spoils all the beauty of the city that is slavery they look like they were well fed but the slaves once do not look any more intelligent than Brutus the young one look once intelligent I mean on the plantations those old Steam Boats and the cotton offices more intelligent. I saw all of our friends at Evansville they promised to write when I left I dont know whether they dont or not. I have nothing more to write at present I will write as often as I can. You might write a letter of your love and direct it to Bold Springs Place Natchez Miss I might get it but it would be sometime. You must give my love to Mr. [Illegible] and All the rest of our family. And tell them that the cure let me know when your married. I soon move it please dear Mother

Your affectionate Son

Ephraim Thompson

I will write to father and tell the next opportunity tell Mr. [Illegible] not to forget their learning it will be a great help any place but remember this that I saw May and the Lord the world come up soon

Page from Thompson's Letter of December 4, 1853.

Courtesy Philip L. Cantelon.
intelligent than Brutes the young Ones look more intelligent I mean on the plantations those on Steam Boats and in the Cities appear More intelligent

I Saw all of our friends at Evansville they promised to write when I left I dont know wheather they done it or not

I have nothng More to write at present I will write as often as I can. You might write a letter if you like and direct it to Cold Springs placer Co California I might get it but it would be uncertain3 You must give My love to Bro Joe and All the rest of our family. and tell Jane that She must let me know who gets Married. So no more at present dear Mother

Your affectionate Son

Ephraim Thompson

I will write to Father or Joseph the next opportuity tell Bro Ned & Billy not to forget ther learing it will be a great help any place. tell granmother that I Saw Mary and She sa[i]d She would come up soon

Marysville California 5th Janry 1854

My Very Dear Brother

I expect you think I have been a long time about writing to you we lift New Orleans on the Seventh of Dcr 53 and Arrived at the Mouth of the San Juan River without any axccident. we had A Rough Sea and I Sufferd from Sea Sickness a little it is about as Nasty a kind of Sickness as I ever had. we Started up the River on the 15th and run about a mile and Stuck on a Sand Bar we laid all night and lighted off in the moring the Scenery on this river is not any thing Extra the ground is low and Marsha and full of Aligators the Vegetation all along the River is So thick that you cant Se[e] through it at all I dont think it is beatiful by any Means I have not Seen any thing that will compare with A Sugar Camp in the Spring. we arrived on this Side and got on bord the SteameShip on the 18th which was Sunday if I mistake not we Shoved out that night and arrived at San Francisco the 31st of Dcr which Made a trip of thirteen days Making 24 days from New Orleans to Sane Francisco. this place is not as large as I expected to see it I mean San Francisco it is about as large as New A[l]bany and not very well built up at that the Streets are very Muddy and full of all kinds of Rubbish but the people all appear to be well off. you dont See but very fiew poor looking people they are nearly all well dressed. and the Hotells Set better tables than thy do in the Atlantic States there is the best markets here that I Ever Saw any place You can get any thing you want for Money Bording is from 16 to 40 dollars pr week in the city. there is a

3 Apparently Thompson and the Duncan boys had a firm idea of where they were going in California. Prior to leaving home they may have corresponded with others from Daviess County who were in the gold region. The fact that the letters are filled with references to men in the gold fields who were familiar to the Thompsons in Indiana seems to justify this supposition.
great deal of gamng here of all kinds I was in a larg gambling [hall] in San Francisco just to take items\(^4\) they had Enough gold Stacked on the tables to Buy daviess County I saw Some loosng and Some win’g. but the house Seemed to make the Most Money we Staid at Sanfrancisco untill Monday Eavnng and the[n] took a Boat for Marysville So here we are doing nothig yet William Duncan Started for the Mines last night to prospect a few days before we all went out it is very dull times the Mines have not got watter to work with Men are only worth two dollars pr day and hard to go to work at that as for a Situation as a Clerk you might as well gow to the Moon as California. this Country is like most of others it is good for Some and bad for others

Yesterday I Saw John Fronk Peter Bassett & Dale Givens John Fronk lives about a mile from here in Yuba City he is engaged in a Miscellaneous Business. trading and keeping about twelve Cows a few hogs and Chickens good Cows are worth from 100. to 175. hogs are worth from 10. to 75. I Saw one Cow that Sold for 300$ She did not look any Better than Some of ours at home Dale Givens is working for John Fronk and Seems to think there is no Country like this Peter Bassett looks about the Same he is keeping a woody\(^5\) and [is] about two hundred yards from John Fronks Habitation he Says that this is the land for him and that he would not live any place else for my part I Cant appreciate it and My Brotherly advice to you is not to Come. it is worth a thousand dollars to Come here either by land or watter there is a thousand things that you would not think of dont think by this that I am discouraged I am tolerable Spirits and good health and Can make a living any place I think. I Cant tell yet how I can do but I hope for the Best and push along

this Beautiful Climate is as Cold as Blixim to day the ice has not thawed in the puddles and looks like it would not for Some time it is the Calculation now for Me and the Duncan Boys and a Sailor that we come across in San Francisco to mine to gether, as Soon as we get diggins I will write to you and let you know how we get along. I want you to write me a long letter and tell me all the news and how they get along at home and how your Business is doing it will give me great pleasure to hear that you are all well give My love to Dear Father & Mother there is hardly an hour that I dont think of them, give my love to Edward and William Granmothr & Jane. you all feel dear to me now

please write Soon and direct your letter to this place, Marysville Yuba Co California the Boys send their Respects to you wishing you to take Care of Girls untill we get Back. give my love to Mr. & Mrs. Duncan tell them we are all well. Rememner us to Any Boddy you wish to dont let Father & Mother work to hard if you Can help it I love them more and more

\(^4\) Thompson possibly meant that he delivered something.
\(^5\) No explanation of the term “Woody” has been found.
Evry day. I have nothing more to Say only be content with your Situation if possible and I evr Remain your affectonate Brothr

Ephraim Thompson

P S.
You may tell Mr Heath that I heard of his Son he lift this place about a week ago for the mines in Company with Joshua McDonald. he was in good health

My Very Dear Father
I have concluded to write the first of evry Month if I am in a Situation to do So if I do not you must not be uneasy for Sometimes we will be off in the Mines eight or ten miles from any place that we can get writing Materils. we have been in this place more than two weeks and have not made any thing yet. we pay ten dollars a week for Board. but we intend moving into a Cabin as Soon as wee find diggins. we have taken up Some claims in the North fork of the American River but we cannot work them untrill June or July when the river is very low. there is a compleit failer in the mines this winter. it is no use to beleive what the papers Say they only hear the best of evy thing. there is thousands of Men in California at present that dont more than pay Board and a great many that dont do that (like Me for instance) it is hard for the best miners to find diggins let alone green hands a man with Capital in this County might make a fortun in ten or fifteen years but a poor man cant make a fortun in a life time. Mining is the hardest work that Mortal man ever done farming is fun by the Side of it. just think of going down a hill a Mile long So Steap that if you Comnsed roling it would be hard to Stop along a little foot path with a long tom on your Shoulder. I tell you it is excersize that gives a filler an appetite. it is Still worse to come up. the ravins in this Country look a good [d]eal [like] the gully Branch. only about forty times as deep. and More Rock and gravel.

the hills look a great deal like Some places below Louisville only there is no comparson in Size. the mountains are coverd with pine timber Not very thick on this ground there is not much heavy timber on the Country that I have Seen there is a fiew Indians about heare they are quer Chaps. they are great fellows to dress Some times you will See one with a Shirt and Striped vest with a high hat without any lower habilliments. they will put on all they have got if they can cary it. I have not had a Chanc to work mutch it comensed Snowig the day that we got heare and it fell to the depth of 18 inches and laid on the ground about a week. I have

6 The "long tom," an apparatus used in mining gold, was an adaptation of the cradle to the needs of large scale production. For further descriptions see Caughey, Gold is the Cornerstone, 164-65; and Paul, California Gold, 61-66. For illustrations of the long tom and other mining procedures see page 166.
Woodcut from a contemporary letter-sheets, published by the Wide West Office, San Francisco, probably about 1851-1852. Such letter-sheets were sold to the miners so that they could write home an illustrated account of their life in the mines. From left to right, the woodcut shows: washing with a cradle or rocker, washing with a pan, tunnel mining, washing with a long tom, washing with a line of sluices, a water company's aqueduct.

worked hard the last week prospecting but have not found any good diggins yet. I made two dollars one day and that is the most that I have made yet. Money is about as hard to make here as it is at home. You make more but the expenses are much more every way. This County shall never be my home if I can make enough money to take me out of it in two years. I may come home poor or I may not be able to come home at all but I hope for better things. My heart almost sinks within me sometimes but I will be industrious and try to live right under all circumstances. I do not write this to make you feel bad but just to show you the truth of the matter. If any body has got employment that they can make a comfortable living at they had better stay at home if they know what is good for their bacon.

I might get a situation in a store at 65 per month but they retail whiskey and other liquors which I would not like to do for any body all the stores have a bar attached to them in the mines.

When I wrote to Joseph from Marysville I did not know what part of the mines I would go to. So I told him to direct his letter to that place but I cannot get it now for there is no post office nearer this place than ten miles. You will please direct my letters to Illinois town, placer county and be very careful to put the middle letter in my name for there are a great many Thompsons about here. I think there is two in this place. Put my name like the following Ephraim W. Thompson

Illinois Town Placer County
California

I hope Joseph has given up coming out to this country it would be the worst thing that he could do. And I do hope that Bro. Edward will not think of it. I should hate to see any of my friends out here. I must bring my letter to a close. One word more never give your consent for any of the boys to come out here.

Give my love to my dear mother and tell her that I remember her advice and I am not ashamed to say that I try to serve God. It is a hard place to do right. Gaming and drinking are virtues here but I shun both as I would a serpent. Give my love to grandmother and Jane. Tell Billy to study hard and be a wise man. Tell him to look over my problems sometimes and maybe he will find something to interest him. Give my love to Mrs. Duncan and tell her that her boys are all well. Some of you will please write every month anyhow and I will try and do the same. Take good care of your health for my sake. My love to all. Your affectionate son

Ephraim W. Thompson

Green Valley May 22d 1854

My very dear father

I received your affectionate letter of the 22d March and I also received from Marysville a letter from Bro. Joseph and was glad to hear that you were all doing well and in good health. I hope you will write often as you
can and let Me know how you get along with the farm and Store. I See by the prices of Produce that farming is about the best business a gowing. And I hope Bro. Edward and William will be content with [it] for it is the best way to live in any Country. it does not Seem to me that I have been away from home more than a month or two and I can hardly realize that things have changed So much Scince I left. So many persons of My acquanetane have died. but I was more Supprised to hear of Mr. Fronks death. he looked So well and hearty the day we left that I did not think of Sutch a thing. I recd. a letter from G[e]o. Fronk a few weeks ago he is at Marysville tending ferry on the Yubo River betwen Yubo City and marysville the two places are about one mile appart he feels his loss as any affectionate Son would and wishes that he had been at home to Comfort his Mother in Sutch a trying time. he Says that John Coleman is up in the mountains at Jeferson Ranch and is doing well. Geo. Says he thinks he will Start for home this fall a year John Fronk will return home this fall there is a great many going home at present the Steamers are crowded evy trip there is a gooded of oppositurs7 and passage is down tolerable low it has been as low as 111=51=35$^4$ but it is Just as it happens it may [be] down one trip and up the next. I am truly grateful to you my Dear Father for Your kind offer to let me have money to come home on but I think I can make enough for that if I keep my health if I cannot I avail myself of the opportunity.

I have obtaned through the influence of Ro[b]t Perkins a Situation in a provision Store in this place with a man by the name of Chesebro he pays me fifty dollars the first Month and if his busines will justify it he will give me Seventy five the next and maby I will Stay with him all Sumner. I have not Seen any of the Duncan Boys for more than a month Since we quit mining together. Wm I think is at Cold Springs yet he is not doing mutch of any thing I dont know where the other boys are but I heard that Thomas had Set in to Work a Year for a man that owns a mill down below for Seventy dollars pr month. I think James Could do well if he would Save what he Maks. Perkins and Moots are livng in this Vally and have been for the last year doing well. Perkins owns a Share in One of the richest River Claims in the county it is Valud at thirty thousand dollars and he owns one tenth of it. Moots Says that he will come home this fall if he can get off—this is the best mining place that I have Seen and yet one half of the people about heare are not mekng More than a living.

I was Sorry very Sorry to hear that Bro. Joseph had been Sick but I hope he is entierly well now I dont Suppose that his business has increased mutch this last winter not So much as to require any help.

7 An "oppositur" is a person going in the opposite direction, i.e., back east.
8 This probably indicates that the fare from San Francisco to an isthmus crossing (Panama or Nicaragua) was $111.00, from there to New Orleans cost $51.00, and from New Orleans to Evansville, $35.00.
the house that I am Staying at has a boarding Service attached to it and there is a Set of Books to keep which keeps me tolerable busy. I Still wear the Same blue coat that I had when I left home and the Same old hat (I think the hat gets better insted of worse).

the weather has been Cold untill the last few days it has been a little Warmer but it is still cool enough to wear a coat. It has Snowed twice Since th first of this month but this is tolerable far up in the mountains—it is as hot as blazes down in the Valley and Sanfracisco.

Geo. Fronk Says that down where he is that it is the Most beautiful Scenery that he ever looked at the ground is perfectly levil for fifty miles out from the river and is coverd over with flouers of all kinds and green oaks thinly scaterd over the Vally.

tell Edward to write me a letter as Soon a[s] you rec this and Billy must write one about fifteen days later and I Should like very much to Red a fiew lines or a fiew Sheats from Mother as Soon as convnint dont Send me any blank paper. fill up with local news about the corn hay hogs or any thing about the farm and how the young orchard looks and how much my pig weighted and all the particilry Remmber me to Granmothe and Jane tell them not to forget me and also all the Neighbors.

and dear Mother do not forget to pray for me and may god Spare us all to meet again. No more at present

Your Affection[ate] Son

Ephraim W. Thompson

I thank you for your kind advice and will try to follow it as close as circumstances will admit. Excuse haste

E. T

Green Valley June 18th 1854.

My Very dear Mother

I recd. your kind letter of the 20th Apil and was Very glad to hear that you were all in good health and getting along So well. farming is a good business and the most pleasant way to live. there is nothing that I would like So well as to be on a farm for a while where I would be out of the hubbub of business. I have traveled untill I am weary of Seeing New Places.

I am Still Clerking for A Cheesebro but business is So dull that I expect I will have to quit. I am not certain about it but I think it Probable—Perkins Sold out his claim that I Spoke about in my last letter for five hundred dollars it was a low price but they were lawing about it at the time and he thought he had better take that than run the risk of loosing all of it. he has another Claim in the River that he wants to work as Soon as the watter falls low enough to put in a floom. a floom is a [?] built like a box about eight feet wide and two feet high So as to cary all the watter in the river and leave the bed dry.
Green Valley is about 18 miles from Illinois town on the north fork of the American River. It is about a mile in length and a half in width. The mountains rise on both sides three or four thousand feet above the river. They are not perpendicular but it is steep to walk straight up. You have to wind about back and forth which makes about two miles up the hill.

I have not heard anything more from the Duncan Boys. But I think they are at work someplace down below here. I don't think they are doing much yet but will soon get into the river where they have got claims. James is at Illinois town taking Degatupty. There is a great many returning home in fact nearly all that have got any money. Perkins & Moots expect to return this fall if they get there claims worked out this summer. Perkins has been rather poorly the last month. He says it is hard work. There is some little sickness in the Valley but nothing serious. I have had good health ever since I arrived in this County. I am heavier than I ever was at home.

My weight is 131. There is the most large men in this County that I ever saw any place. The man that I am clerking for would as soon fight a grizzly bear as not down in the Valley of Sacramento. They are harvesting their barley and oats. And up here it is cold enough to wear winter clothing and sleep under two pairs of blankets.

I still feel as though I did right to leave home although I do not expect to make anything. It stopped building Castles in the air and made me feel the painful reality of life without a home. A little of the same would do several youngsters good about Washington. I would not wish any of them to make the experiment. It is too expensive for more than one out of ten men to grow old faster in this county than any place I ever saw. I think it is exposure and hardship that they have to encounter. Boys have men's faces and men of thirty look like men at home of forty. There is none of that quiet happiness here like you find in some new countries where farming is the main pursuit. But nevertheless I think San Francisco is best. City that I was ever in. There is a free and easy way about the people that is very agreeable.

I am glad to hear that Joseph is doing well. He has a good start in the world and no doubt he is well satisfied. I am glad that he did not come out in my place for I feel confident that he would not have done any better than myself. When you wrote Edward was ploughing but by this time the corn is as high as his head and higher. I suppose Billy and old tom ploughed a right smart chance of corn and to this spring and the garden looks like it always does with vines corn and butter beans in promiscus examples and a hill of gourds in the fence panell evry thing in beautiful confusion. Jane I suppose is still using her utmost endeavors to keep the Cookey fixins in order making bread with her usual ability. Jane is a fine girl and daughter have a tarnation good husband—

I hope dear father will not make any extra exertion in my account. He is getting to old to work hard. As for borrowing money to come home on I
Thompson's Letters from California Gold Fields

will not do it So long as I can make a living but if I Should begin to get behind and could not pay My way I would do it before I would let any boddy loose any thing on my account and if I Should[,] all the money that I get Shall be deducted out of what he intended to give to me. forgive me for Speaking So plain I will never mention the Subject again. do not think My Dear parents that I mentioned this as any thing like a bargain  I hope you will not think So bad of me. I know that any thing at home would be just as mutch mine as yours if I needed it. I never expect to be Wealthy I have got a better head for Spendng mony than to mak[e] it. tell Edward and Billy to Write to me as Soon as they can and tell me all the news in and about and not for both to write on one time I want to know all about old Wily Jones and evybody Else And tell me all about the farm politics and Preachers especialy about Mr Robb and his famly I am very anxious about their health 

tell Mr. Jo. to look out how he perambulates about amongst the young ladies or he will get his Gizard Squashed Some of these fine times it is my advice to him to look Sharp. 

how is Philip Cruse thriving I Suppose he is keeping a lookout for Soft Snaps amongst the bare footed comunity. I Should like to know how many lift for California Scinc I lift and who they were by land or watter—I do not get mutch news in this place the express brings in papers and letters once in two weeks papers from the Eastern States as N. Orlians Lousville etc are worth fifty cents apeeice letters from Sacramento City by Express 1.00 from Illinois town 25¢ 

I have not heard from Geo. Fronk or Coleman Scinc I wrote last. Remember me to all our neighbiors. 

I Give My love to all at home no More at present 

Your Affectionate Son 

Ephraim W. Thompson 

if you look close you will See fine gold in the Sand that is used it came out of the river 

Green Valley July 10th 1854 

My Dear Brother 

I have thought of writing to [you] Several times but never got at it untill this time I received a letter from Bro. Ed. dated May 24th he Seems to be nearly out of news So I will give him time to write me a long letter. he Says you are all farming on a large Scale and will have a large crop of Produce I am glad of that for all kinds of Produce will bring a good Price this comng winter. Jos. wanted to know what the postage was on letters that I rec. from home you can tell him that it is 6 cents to Mountain Springs and I get them from there by Express which costs 25¢ when letter[s] come from Sacramento City the Express charges one dollar.
I think if you all new how anxious I am to hear from home you would write Oftener a Californian is as much delighted to rec. a letter from home as if he had Struck ounce diggins—I heard from Wm & Thomas Duncan they have been Mining down on the river below here about ten Miles on a bar they were doing Very well. they were taking out from 20. to 50 dollars p[r] day but I dont Suppose it will last long it is their Calculation to work in the river about three miles below this place in a few days James is Still at Illinois Town not doing much of any thing. it is Such a dull time that he cannot be Very busy with his dagurities I heard from John Coleman a few weeks Since he is doing very well and Says that he is Stout and hearty as he well can be Geo. Fronk has gone to try his luck in the mines. Coleman also wrote me that John Veal was out in this county and that he had Seen him at Indiana Creek If you ever had any notion of coming out to this county I would advise you to give it up for two thirds of the men in California are not worth ten dollars. I am Staying in a Store and boarding house and I have a good chance to take items and I have found that they nearly all would like to return home if they only had money enough to take them. before leaving home it Seems like a golden dream. where a feller dont wake up untill he finds himself out of money and digging in mud and water to make enough to buy Grb. times are as dull here as they are in Washington and people jeneraly consider themselves in luck if they have any thing to do. there is plenty of men here that will work for fifty or Sixty dollars pr. month and down in the Valley thirty dollars is average Wages. things in California Seems to have recd. a check in the Last year. the papers Blow and gass as much as ever but they never tell the truth only by accident

So Miss Lizzie Merideth has married at last what will Ed. do he will be very loansom but I suppose the affliction can be bard the weather here is very warm but not more So than at home I Suppose you will be done harvesting by the time this reaches you I hope you will all take the world easy for I dont believe in hurrying through life I believe that if a feller could be contend he could do without Money. but I think it is impossible for me to be contented any place—Remeber me to all the family tell Mothe & Father to write to me as Soon as thy can find time and Billy must write. So no more at present

Love to all

Your Affectionate Bro

Ephraim W. Thompson

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9 Thompson delivered supplies from the store to the miners at their "diggins."