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THREE GOLD RUSH LETTERS OF ADONIJAH STRONG WELCH

*Edited by William H. Hermann**

These letters, originally published in the *Milwaukee Sentinel and Gazette* in 1850, were written by a young man of obvious culture and with a keen insight into the impact Americans would have on southern California. In addition, the letters describe a route not frequently followed to California by the "forty-niners." Most significant, they shed some light on a phase of the life of a man who was destined to become a nationally famous educator and an outstanding Iowan.

Adonijah Strong Welch, born in Connecticut in 1821, moved to Michigan about 1839. He received the bachelor of arts degree from the University of Michigan in 1846, then studied law and was admitted to the bar, but did not practice. Turning from law to education in 1847, he accepted the principalship of the Union School in Jonesville, Michigan. This marked the beginning of a long career as a teacher and educational administrator. In 1849, like so many others, he caught the gold fever, left his job, and was "off for California."

After returning to Michigan in 1852, he received his master's degree and was made the first principal of Michigan State Normal School at Ypsilanti. He remained in this position until 1865 when he went to Florida for his health. Here he engaged in business and was elected to the United States Senate for a short term (1868-1869).

The following year Welch was selected for the presidency of Iowa State College at Ames. Inaugurated on March 17, 1869, he had the honor of becoming the first president of that institution. During his administration he did much to develop the physical plant of the college, and he himself laid out much of the campus. But his most important contribution was his service as a pioneer in the field of agricultural education. He resigned in 1883

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because of ill health and was sent abroad by the United States Commissioner of Agriculture to report on agricultural schools in Germany, Belgium, and England. Upon his return the following year he taught history and psychology at Ames until his death in 1889.¹

ROVER'S CAMP, Utah Valley,
Aug. 30, 1849.²

My Dear Friend:

I write in great haste, by a man who starts with the mail this afternoon for the Salt Lake City, sixty miles North of us. We have been in camp here three weeks, and shall continue *in eodem loco* until October, when we shall take the Southern route, which is impassable in the summer. We expected to have continued from the Mormon city [on] the Northern trail,³ which intersects Fremont's trail a hundred miles West of Fort Hall, but a report of the condition of affairs induced us to change our plans. A man who has taken "Sublette's cut off," and turned off the road far beyond Fort Hall,⁴ entered the valley soon after us. From him, and from others who followed him, we learn that the road, for a hundred miles before he reached the Fort, and as far beyond as he went, was impracticable — being so obstructed with dead cattle as to admit no passage for waggons [*sic*]. On this account,

¹ See biographical sketch of Welch by A. B. Noble in *Dictionary of American Biography*, 19:617-18; Michigan Historical Commission, *Michigan Biographies* (2 vols., Lansing, 1924), 2:421.

² *Milwaukee Sentinel and Gazette*, Jan. 17, 1850. The writer, identified only by initials in this letter, was described as "a member of the highest standing of the class which graduated from the University of Michigan in 1846."

³ In taking the northern overland route to California, Welch was following the path most commonly used by the "forty-niners." He and his friends had evidently selected either the Mormon route or the Oregon-California trail to Salt Lake City. Since they came from Michigan, they probably went to St. Joseph or to Council Bluffs, then called Kanessville. Most Middle Westerners selected one of these two jumping-off places because they were closer to home and further advanced along the northern trail. The change in plans necessitated following the Old Spanish Trail, one of the southwestern trails to California. See maps in Archer Butler Hulbert, *Forty-Niners: The Chronicle of the California Trail* (Boston, 1931), 2, 13, 46, 82, 114, 118, 152; Ralph P. Bieber, "The Southwestern Trails to California," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 12:242, 366, 368-9 (December, 1925).

⁴ The "forty-niners" on the northern overland route generally followed the Oregon Trail along the Platte River to Fort Laramie, where a halt was made to rest both themselves and their livestock; to make necessary repairs to their wagons; and occasionally to buy additional supplies. Welch, in a subsequent letter, indicates that he

two new trails had been made, which were but little better. He was never out of sight of loaded waggons, which had been abandoned, and men, women and children were plodding on a-foot to California, eight hundred miles distant. The grass was entirely consumed, so that no animal could live. Still many have bid defiance to danger, and driven on their worn-out oxen, expecting to make the journey of 800 miles before the middle of October, when the winter snows set in and block up the passage of the "Sierra." The Mormons, better acquainted with the road pronounce it madness.⁵ . . .

The "Southern trail" strikes the coast six hundred miles South of the mines. It is 800 [miles] from this valley to the coast. We think we shall make this long journey on horses, provided we can get the requisite number (eighteen) in exchange for our oxen and waggons, before October. My own, a fine black mare, has entirely recovered from the wound inflicted by the horn of an old Buffalo, that I shot from her back. Our provisions will carry us to the Sacramento. All our clothing, except a pair of extra pants, three extra shirts, a coat, a hat, and one pair of boots, apiece, is to be left in lieu of horses. Many emigrants have given as high as \$200 for a good

was at the fort. From here they traveled on through the famous South Pass and crossed the Rocky Mountains. The Mormon Trail more or less paralleled the Platte River-South Pass route, except that it took the north bank rather than the south bank of the Platte. From Fort Bridger it cut directly to Great Salt Lake. The Oregon Trail, on the other hand, swung northwest to Fort Hall. After leaving the latter place, the gold seekers passed well north of Great Salt Lake and then turned southwestward branching off on to what was the California Trail. Sublette's Cutoff, which Welch mentions, eliminated the better watered Fort Bridger detour by crossing the Green River Basin almost directly to Bear River, Wyoming. It was over fifty miles shorter but extremely dry.

⁵ Persons who arrived at Salt Lake City late in the season were warned by the Mormons not to continue on the northern route because of the great danger of being trapped in the mountains by snow. The Mormons urged them to take a southern trail which was not likely to be obstructed by snow in the winter months. The route suggested was the misnamed "Old Spanish Trail," a mule trail which connected Salt Lake City with Los Angeles. Welch was not the only one advised to take this route. A Wisconsin gold seeker, James Wasley, who arrived at Salt Lake City late in the season, was warned by the Mormons not to continue on the northern trail but to take a new route further south. Although being aware of the danger of being trapped in the snow, Wasley decided to proceed over the traditional Oregon-California trail. A company of eight men was organized to trade their wagons and oxen for horses and mules in order to make better time and get across the mountains before October. James Wasley to his brother, Oct. 21, 1849, in Mineral Point *Wisconsin Tribune*, Mar. 1, 1850; Bieber, "The Southwestern Trails to California," 368-9. Chauncey Swan of Iowa City took this southern route in 1849. See Mildred Throne (ed.), "Letters of a Forty-Niner," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 47:63-77 (January, 1949).

horse — others give two yoke of oxen and a waggon. An ox waggon can hardly be given away, while flour is \$10 a hundred, and bacon \$12.

The Salt Lake Valley is about eighty miles long by fifty in width, and enclosed on all sides by very high mountains. We entered it after a fatiguing journey of nearly three months, without seeing a human habitation. Great was our relief at beholding the settlement of the persecuted Mormons. Even corn fields and sheaves of wheat never possessed such beauty in my eyes before, and every thought associated with them came rushing at once into my mind as we descended into the beautiful valley. The city is regularly laid out in lots of an acre and a half, with wide streets. On a bird's eye view, it looks like one immense wheat field, dotted here and there with low black huts made of sun burnt bricks, which the Mormons call "dobeys." I suppose, from the Spanish word "*adobe's*." The population, I am told is ten thousand and rapidly increasing; in twenty years it will be a beautiful city. I have become acquainted with some of the leading men, who seem to be honest and well meaning, but of limited education, and exceedingly bigoted in the peculiarities of their religion. Their sufferings, which have been far greater than I supposed, add another to the thousand proofs the world's history exhibits, that men will cling to a crotchet in religion, and carry it to the stake, while they are ready to persecute to the death all whose doctrines differ essentially from their own.

Nearly South lies the Utah Valley, fifty miles by ten, surrounded by steep mountains that are whitened by perpetual snows, and towering far above the volume of clouds which roll along their rugged sides. Extending through the whole length of the valley lies the Utah lake, into which run from the mountains the purest streams. In these, if we wish to waste an hour in angling, are fine speckled trout, weighing from three to five pounds. Game abounds in the mountains, where is found the grizzly [*sic*] bear. When tired of these pursuits, I read Shakespeare or gaze on the sublime scenery on every side of us.

This valley is settled by about forty Mormon families, who live in a Fort built for protection against the Utah Indians, who, however, are not dangerous. We came here on account of better grass for our cattle, and the chance of getting horses from the Indians, which we hope to accomplish by a trading expedition to the mountains. We are encamped on the bank of a small stream in the Southern part of the valley, about a mile from the Fort.

I cannot regret leaving Michigan, dear as it is to me the home of my

adoption, and the friends I may never meet again, for I have entirely recovered my health, and you know what I have suffered from dyspepsia. But I tell you *inter nos*, I have seen some hard times since I left you. Not what the mountaineers call hard times, for anything short of starvation is of little account with them — but the change of life — of habits formed from infancy — of diet — of employment — of associates — of everything which goes to make up our duties and enjoyments, has resulted occasionally in a few passages, which, without any disposition to complain, I think I may indeed call "hard times."

I ought not, however, to omit the pleasure of the jaunt. With the best of appetites, we have plenty of hard bread and bacon, the principal food of the "*voyageur*," to satisfy them. If we travelled during the day until we were exhausted, we rested with the greater satisfaction on our field beds at night. Occasionally some "startling event," as the killing of a Buffalo, or a stampede among our cattle, would relieve the tedium of our long drives, and then followed days of long marches over sandy roads, with wretched water, and short feed for the wretched worn-out oxen. The last fifty miles before we reached Salt Lake exhibited many curiosities of scenery. We travelled through deep *canons* in which we saw the sun only a small part of the day, owing to the precipitous rocks which rise to an immense height on each side of the road.

Our long journey has wrought amusing changes in our personal appearance. If you saw me, as I now sit on the ground with my portfolio before me you would hardly recognize me; and if you did, would be unwilling, I fear, to acknowledge your *quondam* acquaintance. A slouched hat, the worse for wear, and a pair of moccassins [*sic*] set off the extremities of "*caput et calces*," and in addition a red flannel shirt, and a pair of sheep's gray's complete your friend's toilet. His face shows none of the pallor of the student or the sickliness of lean disease, but is full and sunburnt, and covered with a beard of three months' growth, in which tinges of pale yellow and white struggle for the mastery, the yellow on the whole predominating. But the change is in his person alone. His feelings, attachments, principles and prejudices remain unchanged.

Write to San Francisco. Since we left home we have had no tidings from there, and a few words of news would be an intense relief to our at times almost sickening anxiety.

Yours, &c.

A. S. W.

Rancho del Chino,
500 miles south of San Francisco,
March 1, 1850.⁶

MY DEAR FELLOW:

The intervals between my letters are so long that I can only give you a brief and imperfect account of myself during the period since I last wrote. I sent you three missives while on the road — one from Ft. Laramie,⁷ containing an extract from my journal, for publication; another by the Mormon mail, which I met on the road; and a third from Utah Valley, which is fifty miles south of Salt Lake. From this last point we started about the middle of October, with a company of a hundred waggons, to open a new road to the southern part of California, by way of the Spanish Trail;⁸ and thus avoid the dangers of the northern route.

A regular company was formed and two gentlemen with myself, were appointed to draft a constitution, under which Capt. Baxter⁹ was elected

⁶ Milwaukee *Sentinel and Gazette*, Apr. 19, 1850. The Rancho del Chino was situated on the southern route to California near Los Angeles. It was owned by Colonel Isaac Williams who acquired it through his wife. A hunter and trapper, Williams came to California about 1832 with Ewing Young's band of trappers. Remaining in California, he became a naturalized citizen of Mexico and married Maria de Lugo. Williams was extremely hospitable, and during the Gold Rush a great many immigrants, many of whom were in distress, stopped with him and obtained aid. Grant Foreman (ed.), *A Pathfinder in the Southwest: The Itinerary of Lieutenant A. W. Whipple . . . in the years 1853 & 1854* (Norman, Okla., 1941), 275-6, n. 10; Ralph P. Bieber (ed.), *Southern Trails to California in 1849* (Vol. 5, *Southwest Historical Series*, Glendale, Calif., 1937), 276, n. 213; Robert Glass Cleland, *Pathfinders* (Los Angeles, 1929), 273; J. Gregg Layne, "Annals of Los Angeles," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 13:215 (September, 1934).

⁷ A painstaking search through all Wisconsin newspapers failed to reveal the first two letters referred to by Welch. Possibly they were never received. More likely, they were received but not sent to a newspaper for publication. If turned in for publication, it is possible that the editor did not see sufficient news value in them, particularly since the writer was from Michigan. Many letters written by "Badger forty-niners" were turned over for publication and naturally would have had greater local appeal.

⁸ The so-called "Old Spanish Trail" was an extension of the one from Santa Fe to Salt Lake City that Fremont had traveled in 1844. It passed "through Abiquiu and northwest down the Dolores and across Grand and Green Rivers, thence west to the Sevier, and southwest to the Virgin and Mohave Rivers and through Cajon Pass to Los Angeles. . . . The Old Spanish Trail, properly so-called led to the Great Basin only, and was developed as a result of the Spanish trade with the Yutas." J. Joseph Hill, "The Old Spanish Trail," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 4:444 (August, 1921); Bieber, "Southwestern Trails to California," 368-9.

⁹ Welch and Henry Baxter probably became acquainted in Jonesville, Michigan, as they were both residing there at the time of the California Gold Rush. Baxter in

Colonel, and I received a request to keep a journal, which it was the intention of the company to present to Congress for publication.¹⁰ The whole scheme terminated disastrously; the result showing it to be impossible that large companies should travel together on desert roads. We spent seven weeks in making a distance of two hundred and fifty miles, and the company broke up, seven waggons pursuing the old Spanish trail, and the rest, our waggons among the number, turning due west into the unexplored regions lying near the river of the Great Basin. The deviation proved most unfortunate. We had divided into small divisions of ten waggons each, and after spending three weeks in vainly endeavoring to find a passage through the mountains to Walker's pass,¹¹ a part of us returned to the Spanish trail, leaving thirty waggons of which we have not since heard the slightest tidings. The presumption is, that their owners have either starved, or perished in the snow.¹²

his early life was associated with his father in keeping a store and a mill. After his California adventures he returned to Jonesville, and sometime before the Civil War began he organized the Jonesville "Light Guards." When hostilities opened he entered the conflict as a captain, was commissioned a colonel in 1862, a brigadier general of volunteers in 1863, and was mustered out of the army in 1865 with the brevet of major general of volunteers. He died in Jonesville in 1873. See biographical sketch by Edmund Kimball Alden in *Dictionary of American Biography*, 2:62.

¹⁰ The journal was never turned over to Congress, and there is no record of it in the Library of Congress. Louise G. Caton, secretary of the Library of Congress, to William H. Hermann, Feb. 7, 1938.

¹¹ This pass is located at the southern extremity of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. It was discovered by Joseph Reddeford Walker, a mountain man, who was in the service of Captain Benjamin J. E. Bonneville, a regular army officer on leave from 1831 to 1832 to engage in a trading venture of his own. The enterprise proved unprofitable and in 1832, to recoup his fortunes, Bonneville divided his company. Walker, one of his principal lieutenants, was placed in command of an expedition to trap and explore the territory in and beyond the valley of the Great Salt Lake. He and his men, after suffering many hardships, entered California. On the return journey in 1834 they did not retrace their trail but passed through a gap, on the south slope of the Sierra, which today is appropriately named Walker's Pass. Francis P. Farquhar, "Exploration of the Sierra Nevada," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 4:6-8 (March, 1925); Douglas Sloane Watson, *West Wind: The Life Story of Joseph Reddeford Walker, Knight of the Golden Horseshoe* (Los Angeles, 1934), 20-22, 38, 44-7, 68, 70; Robert Glass Cleland, *This Reckless Breed of Men: The Trappers and Fur Traders of the Southwest* (New York, 1950), 277-301.

¹² Before 1849 the Old Spanish Trail had been traveled only by pack trains. The Wisconsin emigrant, James Wasley, claimed that only one wagon had been taken through this route and that at one place it had to be let down a descent piece by piece with ropes. Wasley suspected that the Mormons were urging emigrants to take this trail to trick them into breaking a wagon road and refused to attempt it. James Wasley to brother, Oct. 21, 1849, Mineral Point *Wisconsin Tribune*, Mar. 1,

Shortly previous to our return, Baxter (our captain) was taken violently ill with the mountain fever, and for three weeks afterwards his life was despaired of. To stop on the road was starvation; and we were obliged to keep constantly moving on. By the aid of a good constitution and the kind attention of Doct. Ormsby,¹³ of Ann Arbor, he survived. The fatigues incident to the constant watching which his illness required, brought an attack of the same character upon me. I saved myself, however, a run of the fever by a timely dose of calomel;¹⁴ but a low intermittent fever set in and continued the rest of the journey. The last four hundred miles consisted of deserts, with water and grass at intervals of from thirty to fifty miles. We were compelled to drive over each of these deserts without halting, and sometimes travelled two days, and the intervening night without sleep. Such hardships were scarcely endurable to those who were well, and you will imagine the sufferings of the sick. Often in the height of the fever, while under a depression of spirits, which I could not control did I think of the warning of Mrs. ——— “You will be sick and among strangers, with no one to sympathize or relieve your sufferings.” The limits of one letter will not permit more detail, but I cannot forbear

1850. As a matter of fact, severe hardships were encountered by the emigrants who attempted to take their wagons through, for the trail led in and out of precipitous canyons and across alkali deserts. Welch was most fortunate in getting back to the Old Spanish Trail after his unsuccessful attempt to find a shorter route. A group of emigrants who left the trail near Mountain Meadow in southwestern Utah, with the same motive as Welch, lost their way and met with great difficulties. Some of them perished in the desert of southern California which thereafter became known as Death Valley. Bieber, “Southwestern Trails to California,” 369.

¹³ Dr. Caleb N. Ormsby was the first physician in Adrian, Michigan. From here he moved to Ann Arbor. Welch might have met him at the latter place when he was attending the University of Michigan. In 1849 Ormsby had financial difficulties and decided to join in the rush for California. Possibly he, Baxter, and Welch came together from Michigan. At any rate, Ormsby, like Welch, stayed over at Salt Lake City and went to California via the Old Spanish Trail, arriving at Los Angeles in 1850. Not successful as a miner, Ormsby decided to return to Ann Arbor in 1856 via Panama. After crossing the Isthmus he took passage on the *Central American*. Unfortunately, the ship was lost at sea off Cape Hatteras. A. L. Millard, “Historical Sketch of Lenawee County,” *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 1:230 (1877); John J. Adams, “Early History of Lenawee County,” *ibid.*, 2:378 (1880); William H. Cross, “A Pioneer Sketch,” *ibid.*, 2:431-2 (1880).

¹⁴ Calomel was monochloride of mercury, a purgative widely used in the nineteenth century particularly for malarial fevers. Madge E. Pickard and Carlyle R. Buley, *The Midwest Pioneer: His Ills, Cures & Doctors* (Crawfordsville, Indiana, 1945), 103-106.

giving you an idea of that dreary journey by narrating the events of one day.

We were crossing a spur of the mountains about 250 miles from the termination of our tour. The ascent had occupied the whole day—the distance being about two miles, through snow a foot deep. At night we found ourselves two miles from the summit, and of course, without water, or grass for cattle. It was intensely cold. The company determined to drive on through the pass, expecting to find a valley beyond, at a distance of six or eight miles, and containing [an] abundance of water and grass. Two teams, however, had given out, and could not proceed. I had ridden my mule all day, the oxen being too weak for me to ride on the waggon; my fever was high, and the circulation in my hands and feet had stopped from cold. I felt that I could not proceed farther, and obtained permission to stop over night in one of the waggons, while the rest of the Rovers advanced to the valley.

The next morning I mounted my half-starved mule and started to rejoin the company, which I supposed to be six or eight miles ahead. At the summit, the mule gave out and refused to carry me. I dismounted and drove him before me six miles down the descent, and reached the foot of the mountain nearly exhausted. But no waggons were in sight. A valley free from snow, stretched twenty miles before me. The teams had not found water and had travelled all night towards the extremity of the valley.

There was no alternative for me, but to lie down in the snow, or try to walk forward. My pulse was beating a hundred a minute, from the fever, and I was suffering from a morbid thirst. This I tried to allay by drinking from the tracks of the oxen, the dirty pools of melted snow which had gathered there. To add to my distress, I knew that parties of the Pah Utah Indians¹⁵ were roaming about, who butchered every straggler they met. I should have regarded myself safe, if I had taken a pistol, but I had not even a pocket knife. Mustering all my strength, I started, and by greater exertions than I ever made before, at last reached the waggons, a distance of twenty five miles from the summit.

¹⁵ Welch's fears were shared by other immigrants regarding the Pah Utah or Piute Indians. Walter Van Dyke, an immigrant from Cleveland, Ohio, who was following the same route, characterized them "as a marauding and savage tribe . . . and seek every opportunity to waylay and massacre small parties or stragglers." Quoted in Owen Cochran Coy, *The Great Trek* (Los Angeles, 1931), 267-8.

Such was one day, and we encountered many more of equal hardship. Some 800 miles back in the desert, our provisions grew short and we were on close rations about three weeks. In one night twenty men had their feet frozen in the snow and were crippled for the rest of the way. — On the Mohave river we met a Pack Train bringing provisions to our relief, and once more we had bread enough; and I can assure you it was appreciated. At last we crossed the southern range of the Sierra, and after being ten months on the road reached *California*.

Well! what kind of a country is it? Your opportunities for learning the facts in reference to Alta California are as good, where you are, as mine, but so far as I have been able to judge, *Lower California* is the most beautiful country, with the finest climate in the world. But its inhabitants, who are principally Spaniards and Indians, are in a state of semi-barbarism, and consequently its resources are to a certain extent undeveloped. The land, which is generally level and of the richest quality, is divided into Ranchos or plantations; the largest of which are twenty miles square, and feed twenty or thirty thousand head of wild cattle, with horses and mules in proportion. But these are all. The arts are in the lowest state imaginable. Their houses are mere pens without floors — their plows are pointed logs; their yokes a straight stick they tie to the horns of their oxen; and every implement of industry shows an equal want of ingenuity and enterprise. They are too indolent to raise much grain, though the soil will yield, I am told, eighty bushels of wheat to the acre; consequently, wheat is sold to the immigrants at \$3 per bushel, while the finest beef cattle in the world bring from \$8 to \$10 per head. Butter, cheese and even milk, you cannot obtain at all, for they are too lazy to tame their cows. A few Americans who own large Ranchos, have American plows, and are doing better than the rest. — Many Ranchos have been abandoned and their owners have gone to the mines.

This state of things the energetic Anglo-Saxon will soon change. The immigration for the next few years will be immense, and the whole country will yield to American customs. The large Ranchos will be cut up into farms, and their products will supply the wants of a dense population. Property will rapidly change hands, and it will be easy for the shrewd Yankee to reap the benefit of the change. The mineral wealth of this country has not been over-rated. Two new Placers, it is reported, have been opened in Tulare valley, one of which is within two hundred miles of this

Rancho. To this, I shall proceed, if an exploration in which I am about to engage, should fail. But I must hasten to write a few words of my "plans and prospects," and then close.

The Rovers, finding that a joint stock company is not the "thing" for this country, have dissolved, and each gone on his way rejoicing. — Baxter and I shall work together, and the little means which a long journey has left, will be sufficient to establish us at the mines, *should we go there*. We have been in California about three weeks. While on our way to the Mission San Gabriel,¹⁶ where we expect to stop for a time to recruit our animals, we stopped at the Rancho of Col. Williams, an American, and immensely wealthy.¹⁷ He was privately fitting out a small company to go back on the desert, 150 miles, and examine a spot where gold had been found. I received private proposals to go as Mineralogist, which I have accepted. Some pieces of gold have been shown to me — two were as large as a pea, and imbedded in a matrix of pure white quartz. From the accounts given, I cannot but have high hopes, and if we succeed, our fortune is made; if not, I shall return in the course of three weeks, and proceed north with Baxter to the mines. — He is not quite well yet, and will rest at the Mission until I return or send back for him. We start to-morrow, with six men and twelve mules. There is some little danger from the Indians, but I have learned to despise them. I am in good health and fine spirits. The great object for which I came to this country is already attained. I shall work

¹⁶ Welch probably followed the Mohave River, to which he referred early in this letter, to the San Bernardino Mountains, crossing through the "San Bernardino canyon" (Cajon Pass) and arriving at San Gabriel Mission. In following this suggested route he would have been tracing the footsteps in part of the route taken by the Armijo expedition to California in 1829-1830. This was a company of some sixty Mexican traders under the command of Antonio Armijo. They succeeded in opening a road from New Mexico to California by a route north of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Hill, "The Old Spanish Trail," 465-6.

¹⁷ Estimates of Colonel Isaac Williams' wealth vary, but it is obvious that he was extremely prosperous. After acquiring the Rancho del Chino or Rancho Santa Ana del Chino by his marriage, he enlarged it to about 35,000 acres and in a few years had some 30,000 head of cattle. In 1847 it was claimed that the annual slaughter of 2,500 steers yielded him an income of \$30,000. Foreman, *Pathfinder in the Southwest*, 275-6, n. 10. The correspondent of the *New York Herald*, writing from the ranch on August 24, 1849, said it "was a splendid property, comprising 63,000 acres of the best land in the universe. Almost everything is, or can be raised here. . . . The colonel has, in his fields about 20,000 head of horned cattle, 1,000 horses, several hundred mules, and sheep without limitation." Quoted in Bieber (ed.), *Southern Trails to California in 1849*, 276, n. 213.

hard during the next two years. I have spent a few days at Col. Williams' request, examining some springs of Naptha or Bituminous tar, on his land. Found Petroleum in immense quantities. I think bituminous coal will be found there. I have sent an account of it to San Francisco for publication.

A. S. W.

STOCKTON, California,
June 30th 1850.¹⁸

DEAR W.:

I have an opportunity to send you another epistle, and a few minutes to write it. — I have written several letters since I left the States, but have not as yet received one word in reply; indeed, for more than a year I have not obtained a single item of intelligence *from any one* in the States, though I have frequently sent to San Francisco per express for that purpose.

My last (which if I recollect was a long letter), gave you an account of my arrival at Williams' Rancho, in lower California. It was written about the middle of February, and soon after, I started with a party of seven, to explore in a desert which extends some two hundred miles beyond the Sierra Nevada, for gold, of which a little had been discovered by one of the emigrants who came in on the old Spanish trail from Santa Fe. In three weeks we opened a vein of quartz containing the precious "ore," but it did not prove sufficiently rich to warrant continued operations, especially as there was no water or grass in the vicinity. We took back, however, a few ounces. I obtained some beautiful specimens of gold in the matrix, which, if I live to return east, I shall present to the University.

On our return from beyond the Sierra, Baxter and I, with three others, started North for the Mariposa diggings — some four hundred miles distant, by way of the Tulare Valley. High rivers, and a few explorations on the road caused so much delay, that we did not reach Mariposa until the 1st of June. We had lost nothing, however, by delay. The gold rivers, which are kept high by snows melting on the mountains, are not sufficiently low for successful operations until the 1st of Augt., and the proper season for digging is during the four subsequent months. Finding that men were averaging no more than \$3 or \$4 per day, with hard work on any of the rivers, we kept journeying north until we arrived at this place where I have

¹⁸ Milwaukee Daily Sentinel and Gazette, Sept. 25, 1850.

since remained *cum nullo negotio*. To-morrow I shall start alone with provisions and tools for the Merced River — some 60 miles south, where, if I can [find] a good location, I shall remain through the season, and employ perhaps two or three Spaniards. I have paid some attention to the Spanish language and can converse in it without much difficulty.

So much in brief for my "labores," and now, my dear fellow, what shall I say for my-self? — If I were seated face to face with you, *how I could talk*; but the narrow limits of a hasty letter embarrasses me. I am not discouraged but lonely. For a whole year I have been without the comforts of life — without congenial society, and without the means of improvement. Under such circumstances man always degenerates; but I have as yet contracted none of the wide-spreading vices of California. I neither swear, drink, nor play "Monte"; yet thousands who held a respectable position in the States have sunk to the lowest degradation by these vices. I give you a true picture of the American position of society in California, when I say that gamblers, swindlers and *prostitutes* form its aristocracy. — With this fact before you, the rest can be easily imagined. Stockton contains about five thousand inhabitants, and has obtained most of its growth this Spring. Yesterday, which was Sunday, the gambling houses of which there are three, were crowded to overflowing, and fortunes were rapidly changing hands. High above each of those schools of infamy floats a flag, with the stars and stripes. At one end of the town a horse-race was thickly attended, while the Circus was in full tilt at the other. I found a little company of fifty men and two or three women at church, listening to the preaching of the Gospel, and gladly joined them, thus renewing the associations of other and better days.¹⁹

I have not yet made my "pile," but hope to dig two or three thousand this summer, and as much next winter, teaching English to the Spaniards; shall perhaps employ one or two this season to dig for me. The mines, in general, are a great humbug. Perhaps one man in ten is successful; his success forms the criterion by which the "diggings" are judged in the States. — A few will return rich, many with barely sufficient to take them home. If you were here I should study the Mexican laws of conveyancing, and we would set up in South California with the certainty of success. As it is, I think I shall return home next Spring.

Yours, &c., A. S. WELCH

¹⁹ Welch was deeply religious throughout all of his life.