

A LETTER FROM AN IMMIGRANT

a paper submitted to

CALIFORNIA PIONEERS OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY,

April 30, 1979

by

Joyce Link
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ROBERT CADEN KEYES

Robert Caden Keyes was born in Munroe County, Virginia in 1818 to Humphrey and Sarah Hanley Keyes. The family later moved to Springfield, Sangamon County, Illinois. In 1845 he left his mother, brothers James and Gershom, and sister Margaret, their families, and his friends to come to California.

He traveled with the William B. Ide family. Ide was also from Sangamon County and had been planning the trip for several years. Like Keyes, he was originally from further east and had moved before. There is no record of Cads reason for leaving Springfield. Perhaps because he was young and it was a popular thing to do.

Because Ide was important in California politics for years, the wagon train of 1845 is well documented with reprints of written records. The journal of Jacob R. Snyder starts on Monday the 12th of May 1845 when the party "Left Independence 12th" and goes through October 21st when they "arrived at Yerba Buena." The entire journal appears in the

people, and gave a very bad report of the farming possibilities in California. He seems to have the classic case of culture shock. He reported bad things about Columbey (Oregon), too. No one who reads this letter will think he encouraged his relatives in Illinois to follow him even tho he was "Lonsen for som child to play with O it I was back to see Virginia and all the littel fellas."

Even though this letter is postmarked Jun 24, it is almost certain that Reeds had recieved it. A letter from Virginia to a cousin in Illinois written from Independence and dated July 12 says " We have heard from uncle Cad severl times he went to California and now is gone to Oregon he is well".

And when Reeds finally got to California after the winter in the mountains Virginia wrote again to cousins on May 16, 1847 "We have not saw uncle Cadon yet but we have had 2 letters from him he is well and is coming here as soon as he can."

It is possible that California looked better to Cad after he returned from Oregon and had "som child to play with" because he stayed. He died in 1845 and is buried at Oak Hill cemetary in San Jose not far from his sister Margaret and her family.

"Quarterly of the Society of California Pioneers" for March 1931. The tone of the journal, with few exceptions, is matter of fact. Allowing for the rigors of travel and what must have been serious space limitations that seems understandable. The party seems to have been loosely organized. They travelled the same road as the "Emigration", the rear division of which alone had 50 wagons and 80 men. Ide's group petitioned to join them at one time but was not accepted.

On July 26th the journal says

Moved our encampment on the opposite side of the Creek and near Fort Bridger. Here are a number of lodges and a temporary place for trade & a trapper rendezvous. The location is in every respect the best for a trading post that I have yet seen ...

Sunday 27th

Still remained at Bridger for the purpose of arranging our business to commence packing.

Monday 28th

Completed our arrangements and started at 3 O' clock. We were very much indebted to Capt. Walker & Mr. Vaseus for their kind attention & assistance, this mode of travel being entirely novel to us, but to old mountain men none other need be recommended;...

In A Biographical Sketch of William B. Ide..., Ide's daughter, who was 18 at the time of the trip, names the people who traveled with them. She names the young men first.

A party of young men concluded to 'pack through;' that is, to go on horseback - pack themselves and their baggage on horses. This party consisted of Messrs.

Knight, R. C. Keyes, Jacob R. Snyder,
 Lewis, William Blackburn, George
McDougal, and several others, whose
names I have forgotten.

Evidently the young men were impressive in their new mode of travel.

Cad was very fond of his horse, Nittingwork, it seems. In the letter he makes special mention of how well he traveled on her to Monterey, and tells Reed that she is well. Nittingwork's name is probably related to his "traid" of tailoring, by which he earned "\$9 dollars a week...hard money every saturday" in Monterey.

What little information there is of the trip in the letter agrees with the printed records. Cad says to Reed "I suppose it will surprise you sum when you find that I have com to this countrey." The wagon train had started for Oregon and changed it's destination by vote of the members at Fort Hall. For this party the change of plans was not catastrophic as it was for the 1846 party that Reeds came with. The courage of the travelers who started out for a place they really didn't know how to get to stuns a modern traveler.

In this instance, reaching his destination was something of a shock. Cad didn't like the fleas, climate, or

The History of the Letter

The following letter was written by Robert Caden Keyes to his brother-in-law James Frazier Reed of Springfield, Ill. It is dated October 26th, 1845 and has a November postscript. The postmark says Jun 24. Keyes wrote it from Monterey, Ca.

The letter was donated to the Illinois State Historical Library upon the death of Margaret Gard Baird in Springfield in 1964. She recieved the letter when her aunt, Daisy Day Johnston, died in Sherman Oaks, Ca. Before this the ownership of the letter or its whereabouts is not certain.

It is a reasonable surmise that Mrs. Johnston got the letter from her mother, Margaret Keyes Day, and that she, in turn, got it from her father James W. Keyes.

James W. Keyes and Robert Caden Keyes were brothers. Their sister Margaret married James Frazier Reed.

The letter has made at least two trips from California to Illinois, and one from Illinois to California. It has been in the family for five generations. The letter and its writer set a family precedent for travel between two states.

The letter is two pages and has a short postscript on the third page. The final sentence of the postscript seems humorous. "But what is wors than all thares no schulls to send your childrin too" seems a strange statere nt for a person of his writing ability. But Cad, as his family called him, was aware that even the girls in his family were educated at a time when this was not considered mandatory.

If you try to read phonetically the letter is easier to understand. Cad spells caught - "caut" and range - "raing." None of the early immigrants felt inadequate to write family letters. Perhaps their formal correspondence was more correct. If so, it lacks the charm of these letters.

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James Earl
Road, Middle
Middle



James Earl
Middle

Upper California

Pompey Oct 1849

I have been thinking of you and long for you to be in
our in California and our well and hope that
we have been long may find you and let us know
I landed at Capt. Smith's house the last day of
Sept and had a very good dinner at the house that
I had a surprise when you came here
I have come to this country My reason for
coming to this country first was that the land
was better and I want to see the place before
I come home. This country I will try to describe
to you if I can. First the soil all the country
is best state of water & timber for to make it
a good soil for farming for this is the best
I have ever seen without you written it and
your stock does not stray 40 miles
from water and in the best place it is the
best place for the raising of the case was
and the ground that is needed for raising
the cows or winter among the winter
and are all horses and Col. Emory it rains all
of months out of the year I have this from 20 or
30 different men that has lived there one is a
natives of mine and all of these want to
cut the the State and again that is the

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the place for me, I am working out
Grand Meer and can clear 9 dollars a week
I will hold my every dollar day. I will
not leave till spring and you over is not
I have no part. If you are sure that you
would not come out, I would come there
in the summer and not go to Columbia
for I will, I was at home now I would stay
there, but as soon as hear I will see it
all now. There is Jim men hear for coal is
take to Columbia but when I told them
that there was too coal you there they would not
buy it but they said that would glad
the market. This mountain is 200 miles below
Suller on the coast of the Pacific. I left
last sun day and the company 150 miles
from the settlements and came in on back winds
with this breeze, and notwithstanding carried me in
with good speed. There is a company of 51 waggon
and horses that there is some there in at
a good way, it is a frozen whaler in
the port and can me to you. I am
I am glad to hear my boy is all in health
with his bits I am so larsen for some child
to my with it I was with the Sea Virginia
and all the little fellows I would be glad in
my heart to see you. But remain yours
I am with respect to all my friends

R. P. Meyer

November 2nd 1845

I will write you the price of things so far
as now, milk cows are 12th Beef cattle are from
6 to 8th and you can see the seeds for 150 in
cash, flour is 8 per hundred, potatoes 50 cts a bush
that is 25 lbs. Coffee 50 cts per lb sugar 37. But what is
dear than all these, no schools to send your children
to

R. C. Keyes