



PERSONAL STORIES
EXPERIENCES OF REAL PEOPLE WHO KNEW CALIFORNIA IN THE 1840s
(Gathered by Genie Barry, Sequoia Elementary School, Oakland, California)

Person	Page
Richard Henry Dana An American traveling on a trading ship	2
Prudencia Higuera The daughter of a Californio	4
Moses Schallenberger A teenaged pioneer who spent a winter alone in the Sierras	6
Virginia Reed A young survivor of the Donner Party	9
Sarah Winnamucca (Thocmetony) A Native American experience of the pioneer movement	13



Richard Henry Dana – A Description of Californios

Taken from **Two Years Before the Mast** (1840), by Richard Henry Dana, as found in **California Heritage**, John & LaRee Caughey, ed., Ward Ritchie Press, 1966, pp 120, 124, 125, 126.

. . . I was most struck with the fineness of the voices and beauty of the intonations of both sexes. Every common ruffian-looking fellow, with a slouched hat, blanket cloak, dirty underdress, and soiled leather leggings, appeared to me to be speaking elegant Spanish. It was a pleasure simply to listen to the sound of the language.

Another thing that surprised me was the quantity of silver that was in circulation. I certainly never saw so much silver at one time in my life, as during the week that we were in Monterey. The truth is, they have no credit system, no banks, and no way of investing money but in cattle. They have no circulating medium but silver and hides -- which the sailors call "California bank notes." Everything that they buy they must pay for in one or the other of these things. The hides they bring down dried and doubled, in clumsy ox-carts, or upon mules' backs and money they carry tied up in a handkerchief,--fifty, eighty, or an hundred dollars and half dollars.

CALIFORNIO MEN

The officers were dressed in the costume which we found prevailed through the country --- a broad-brimmed hat, usually of a black or dark brown color, with a gilt or figured band round the crown, and lined inside with silk; a short jacket of silk or figured calico, (the European skirted body-coat is never worn); the shirt open in the neck; rich waistcoat, if any; pantaloons wide, straight, and long, usually of velvet, velveteen or broadcloth; or else short breeches and white stockings. They wear the deer-skin shoe, which is of a dark brown color, and (being made by Indians) usually a good deal ornamented. They have no suspenders, but always wear a sash round the waist, which is generally red, and varying in quality with the means of the wearer. Add to this the never-failing cloak, and you have the dress of the Californian. This last garment, the cloak, is always a mark of the rank and wealth of the owner. The "gente de razon," or aristocracy, wear cloaks of black or dark blue broadcloth, with as much velvet and trimmings as may be; and from this they go down to the blanket of the Indian, the middle classes wearing something like a .. large table-cloth, with a hole in the middle for the head to go through. [*a poncho*] This is often as coarse as a blanket, but being beautifully woven with various colors, is quite showy at a distance. Among the Spaniards there is no working class, (the Indians being slaves and doing all the hard work); and every rich man looks like a grandee, and every poor scamp like a broken-down gentleman. I have often seen a man with a fine figure and courteous manners, dressed in broadcloth and velvet, with a noble horse completely cover with trappings; without a real in his pockets, and absolutely suffering for something to eat.



CALIFORNIO WOMEN

... The women wore gowns of various texture --- silks, crape, calicoes, etc.,- made after the European style, except that the sleeves were short, leaving the arm bare, and that they were loose about the waist, have no corsets. They wore shoes of kid, or satin, sashes or belts of bright colors, and almost always a necklace and ear rings. Bonnets they had none ... They wear their hair (which is almost invariably black, or a very dark brown) long in their necks, sometimes loose, and sometimes in long braids; though the married women often do it up on a high comb. Their only protection against the sun and weather is a large mantle, which they put over their heads, drawing it close round their faces, when they go out of doors, which is generally only in pleasant weather. When in the house or sitting out in front of it, which they often do in fine weather, they usually wear a small scarf or neckerchief of a rich pattern. A band, also, about the top of the head, with a cross, star, or other ornament in front, is common. Their complexions are various, depending -- as well as their dress and manner -- upon their rank; or, in other words, upon the amount Spanish blood they can lay claim to. Those who are of pure Spanish blood, having never intermarried with the aborigines, have clear brunette complexions, and sometimes even as fair as those of English women. There are but few of these families in California, being mostly those in official stations ...

The fondness for dress among the women is excessive, and often the ruin of many of them. A present of a fine mantle, or of a necklace or pair of ear-rings gains the favor of the greater part of them. Nothing is more common than to see a woman living in a house of only two rooms, and the ground for a floor, dressed in spangled satin shoes, silk gown, high comb, and gilt, if not gold, ear-rings and necklace. If their husbands do not dress them well enough, they will soon receive presents from others.



Prudencia Higuera – Trading with the Americans

Written when she was in her 60s. Taken from **Century XLI** (1890) pp 192 – 193, included in **California Heritage**, John & LaRee Caughey, ed., Ward Ritchie Press, 1966, pp 126 – 128. .

Martinez

In the autumn of 1840 my father lived near what is now called Pinole Point, in Contra Costa County, California. I was then about twelve years old, and I remember the time because it was then that we saw the first American vessel that traded along the shores of San Pablo Bay. One afternoon a horseman from the Peraltas, where Oakland now stands, came to our ranch, and told my father that a great ship, a ship "with two sticks in the center," was about to sail from Yerba Buena into San Pablo and Suisun to buy hides and tallow.

The next morning my father gave orders, and my brothers, with the peons, went on horseback into the mountains and smaller valleys to round up all the best cattle. They drove them to the beach, killed them there, and salted the hides. They tried out the tallow in some iron kettles that my father had bought from one of the Vallejos, but as we did not have any barrels, we followed the common plan in those days. We cast the tallow in round pits about the size of a cheese, dug in the black adobe and plastered smooth with clay. Before the melted tallow was poured into the pit an oaken staff was thrust down in the center, so that by the two ends of it the heavy cake could be carried more easily. By working very hard we had a large number of hides and many pounds of tallow ready on the beach when the ship appeared far out in the bay and cast anchor near another point two or three miles away. The captain soon came to our landing with a small boat and two sailors, one of whom was a Frenchman who knew Spanish very well, and who acted as interpreter. The captain looked over the hides, and then asked my father to get into the boat and go to the vessel. Mother was much afraid to let him go, as we all thought the Americans were not to be trusted unless we knew them well. We feared they would carry my father off and keep him a prisoner. Father said, however, that it was all right; he went and put on his best clothes, gay with silver braid and we all cried, and kissed him good-by, while mother clung about his neck and said we might never see him again. Then the captain told her: "If you are afraid I will have the sailors take him to the vessel while I stay here until he comes back. He ought to see all the goods I have, or he will not know what to buy. After a little my mother let him go with the captain, and we stood on the beach to see them off. Mother then came back, and had us all kneel down and pray for father's safe return. Then we felt safe.

He came back the next day, bringing four boat-loads of cloth, axes, shoes, fish lines, and many new things. There were two grindstones, and some cheap jewelry. My brother had traded some deerskins for a gun and four tooth-brushes, the first ones I had ever seen. I remember that we children rubbed them on our teeth till the blood came, and; then concluded that after all we liked best the bits of pounded willow root that we had used for brushes before. After the captain had carried all the hides and tallow to his ship he came back, very much pleased with his bargain, and gave my father, as a present, a little keg of what he called Boston rum. We put it away for sick people.



After the ship sailed my mother and sisters began to cut out new dresses, which the Indian women sewed. On one of mine mother put some big brass buttons about an inch across, with eagles on them. How proud I was! I used to rub them hard every day to make them shine, using the tooth-brush and some of the pounded egg-shell that my sisters and all the Spanish ladies kept in a box to put on their faces on great occasions, Then our neighbors, who were ten or fifteen miles away, came to see all the things we had bought. One of the Moragas heard that we had the grindstones, and sent and bought them with two fine horses.

Soon after this I went to school, in an adobe, near where the town of San Pablo now stands. A Spanish gentleman was the teacher, and he told us many new things, for which we remember him with great respect. But when he said the earth was round we all laughed out loud, and were much ashamed. That was the first day, and when he wrote down my name he told me that I was certainly "La Cantinera, the daughter of the regiment." Afterward I found out it was because of my brass buttons. One girl offered me a beautiful black colt she owned for six of the buttons, but I continued for a long time to think more of those buttons than of anything else I possessed.



Moses Schallenberger's Story of His Winter Alone in the Sierras

Source: from Moses Schallenberger's journal in **The Opening of the California Trail** (ed. by George Stewart)

When the wagons of the Stevens-Murphy Party reached Truckee Lake (now Donner Lake), it was clear that some of the wagons would have to be left behind, so that the oxen could be double and triple-yoked to the others. However, many of the emigrants had brought valuable goods, which they hoped would be the start of their fortunes in California. Moses Schallenberger volunteered to stay behind while the others continued on. He would stay with the goods until others were able to return with help. He was seventeen or eighteen at the time.

There seemed little danger to me in undertaking this. Game seemed to be abundant. We had seen a number of deer, and one of our party had killed a bear, so I had no fears of starvation. The Indians in that vicinity were poorly clad, and I therefore felt no anxiety in regard to them, as they probably would stay further south as long as cold weather lasted. Knowing that we were not far from California, and being unacquainted with the climate, I did not suppose that the snow would at any time be more than two feet deep, nor that it would be on the ground continually.

After I had decided to stay, Mr. Joseph Foster and Mr. Allen Montgomery said they would stay with me, and so it was settled, and the rest of the party started across the mountains. They left us two cows, so worn out and poor that they could go no further.

The morning after the separation of our party, which we felt was only for a short time. . . we set about making a cabin, for we determined to make ourselves as comfortable as possible, even if it was a short time. We cut saplings and yoked up our poor cows and hauled them together. These we formed into a rude house, and we covered it with rawhides and pine brush. A hole was cut for a door.

. . . On the evening of the day we finished our little house it began to snow, and that night it fell to a depth of three feet. . . It did not worry us much, however, for the weather was not at all cold, and we thought the snow would soon melt. But we were doomed to disappointment. A week passed, and instead of any snow going off more came. At last we were compelled to kill our cows, for the snow was so deep that they could not get around to eat.

. . . It kept on snowing continually, and our little cabin was almost covered. It was now about the last of November . . . and we began to fear that we should all perish in the snow.

. . . We now began to feel very blue, for there seemed no possible hope for us. We had already eaten about half our meat, and with the snow on the ground getting deeper and deeper each day, there was no chance for game.

. . . Death by starvation stared us in the face. At last, after due consideration, we determined to start for California on foot. Accordingly we dried some of our beef, and each of us carrying ten pounds of meat, a pair of blankets, a rifle and ammunition, we set out on our perilous journey.

Note: none of them had ever used snowshoes before. The crude snowshoes they fashioned were clumsy, and by the time they reached the summit, Moses was exhausted and suffering muscle cramps. Realizing he wasn't going to be able to continue, he volunteered to return to the cabin, where a quarter of the beef remained, while the two men continued on. The men reluctantly agreed.

We did not say much at the parting. The feeling of loneliness that came over me as the . . . men turned away I cannot express, though it will never be forgotten.

. . . My companions had not been long out of sight before my spirits began to revive, and I began to think like Micawber that something might "turn up." So I strapped on my blankets and dried beef, shouldered my gun, and began to retrace my steps to the cabin.

. . . As soon as I was able to crawl around the next morning, I put on my snow-shoes, and, taking my rifle, scoured the country thoroughly for foxes. The result was . . . plenty of tracks, but no fox.

Discouraged and sick at heart, I came in from my fruitless search and prepared to pass another night in agony. As I put my gun in the corner, my eyes fell upon some steel straps that Captain Stevens had left behind in his wagon. In an instant the thought flashed across my mind, "If I can't shoot a coyote or fox, why not trap one?" . . . My spirits began to rise immediately. . . I set my traps. That night I went to bed with a lighter heart, and was able to get some sleep.

As soon as daylight came I was out to inspect the traps . . . To my great delight I found in one of them a starved coyote. I soon had his hide off and his flesh roasted in a Dutch oven. I ate his meat, but it was horrible. I next tried boiling him, but it did not improve the flavor. . . For three days that was all I had to eat. On the third night I caught two foxes. I roasted one of them, and the meat was . . . delicious.

I now gave my whole attention to trapping . . . I caught, on average, a fox in two days, and every now and then a coyote. I never really suffered for something to eat, but was in almost continual anxiety for fear the supply would give out . . .

As soon as one meal was finished I began to be distressed for fear I could not get another one. My only hope was that the supply of foxes would not become exhausted. For bread and vegetables I had no desire. Salt I had plenty, but never used. I had just coffee enough for one cup, and that I saved for Christmas.



The daily struggle and the uncertainty under which I labored were very wearing. I was always worried and anxious, not about myself alone, but in regard to the fate of those who had gone forward. I would lie awake nights and think of these things.

. . . Fortunately, I had plenty of books, Dr. Townsend having brought quite a library. I used often to read aloud, for I longed for some sound to break the oppressive stillness. For the same reason, I would talk aloud to myself. At night I build large fires and read by the light of the pine knots as late as possible, in order that I might sleep late the next morning, and thus cause the days to seem shorter.

What I wanted most was enough to eat, and the next thing I tried hardest to do was kill time. I thought the snow would never leave the ground, and the few months I had been living here seemed like years.

One evening, a little before sunset, about the last of February, as I was standing a short distance from my cabin, I could distinguish the figure of a man moving toward me. I first thought it was an Indian, but very soon I recognized the familiar face of Dennis Martin. My feelings can be better imagined than described.

Dennis Martin had come to rescue Moses, once he realized the boy was alone. Moses' sister Elizabeth Townsend had also begged him to go after Moses, rather than wait for a big party to fetch the remaining wagons and goods.

Mr. Martin was able to make better snowshoes for Moses and fit them better, so that he and Moses were able to make it safely over the Sierras to the Sacramento Valley.





Virginia Reed's Letter to Her Cousin After Surviving a Bitter Winter in the Sierra Nevada Mountains as a Member of the Donner Party

Virginia Reed was the thirteen or fourteen year-old daughter of Margaret and James Reed. She, with her half-sister Martha (Patty) and two half-brothers, Jimmy and Tommy, were children of a well-to-do family who set out for California almost as on an extended picnic. Virginia rode her own fancy pony for much of the way. For the first half of the journey, they were blessed with good fortune. But by the time the wagon train reached Utah, their luck ran out. They had to abandon one of their wagons, they lost most of their oxen and cattle, Mr. Reed was banished from the party, and the family spent one of the worst winters of the time stranded without enough food in the high mountains, while Mr. Reed tried again and again to organize a rescue party to bring them to safety. Here is Virginia's fourteen year-old view of the experience, as told to a cousin in Illinois.

Napa Vallie
California
May 16th 1847

My Dear Cousin

I take this oppertunity to write to you to let you now that we are all Well at present and hope this letter may find you all well to My Dear Cousin I am going to write to you about our trubels geting to Callifornia. We had good luck til we come to big Sandy thare we lost our best yoak of oxens we come to Brigers Fort & we lost another ox we sold some of our provisions & baut a yoak of Cows & oxen and thay pursuaded us to take Hastings cutof over the salt plain thay said it saved 3 Hundred miles. we went that road & we had to go through a long drive of 40 miles With out water Hastings said it was 40 but i think 80 miles We traveld a day & a nother day and at noon pa went on to see if he coud find Water. he had not bin gone long till some of the oxen give out and we had to leve the wagons and take the oxen on to water one of the men staid with us and the others went on with the cattel to water pa was a coming back to us with water and met the men & thay was about 10 miles from water pa said thay would get to water that nite and the next day to bring the cattel back for the wagons and bring some water. pa got to us about noon the man that was with us took the horse and went on to water We wated thare thinking he would come we wated till night and We thought we would start and walk to Mr Donners wagons that night we took what little water we had and some bread and started pa caried Thomas and all the rest of us walk we got to Donner and thay were all a sleep so we laid down on the ground we spred one shawl down we laid down on it and spred another over us and then put the dogs on top it was the couldes night you most ever saw the wind blew and if it haden bin for the dogs we would have Frosen as soon as it was day we went to Mrs Donners she said we could not walk to the Water and if we staid we could ride in thare wagons to the spring so pa went on to the water to see why thay did not bring the cattel when he got thare thare was but one ox and cow thare none of the rest had got to water Mr. Donner come out that night with his cattel and brought his wagons and all of us in we staid thare a week and Hunted for our cattel and could not find them so some of the campania took thare oxens and went out and brout in one wagon and cashed the other tow and a grate many things all but What we could put in one wagon we Had to devied our provisions out to them to get them to carie it We got three yoak with our ox & cow so we went on that way a while and we got out of provisions and pa had to go on to callifornia for provisions we could not get along that way. in 2 or 3 days after pa left we had to cash our wagon and take Mr graves wagon and cash some more of our things. Well we went on that way a while and then we had to get Mr eddies wagon we went on that



way a while and then we had to cash all our close except a change or 2 and put them in Mr Brins wagon and Thomas & James rode the other 2 horses and the rest of us had to walk. we went on that way a While and we come to a nother long drive of 40 miles and then we went with Mr Donner We had to walk all the time we was a travling up the truckee river we met a man and to Indians that we had sent on for provisions to Suter Fort they had met pa not fur from suters Fort he looked very bad he had not ate but 3 times in 7 days and the three last days without any thing his horse was not abel to carrie him they give him a horse and he went on so we cashed some more of our things all but what we could pack on one mule and we started Martha and James road behind the two Indians it was raining then in the Vallies and snowing on the montains so we went on that way 3 or 4 days till we come to the big mountain or the callifornia Mountain the snow then was about 3 feet deep there was some wagons there they said they had attempted to croos and could not. well we thought we would try it so we started and they started again with those wagons the snow was then up to the mules side the farther we went up the deeper the snow got so the wagons could not go so they pack there oxens and started with us carrying a child a piece and driven the oxens in snow up to there wast the mule Martha and the Indian was on was the best one so they went and broak the road and that indian was the Pilet so we wint on that way 2 miles and the mules kept faling down in the snow head formost and the Indian said he could not find the road we stoped and let the indian and man go on to hunt the road they went on and found the road to the top of the mountain and come back and said they thought we could git over it is did not snow any more well the Weman were all so tirder caring there Children that they could not go over that night so we made a fire and got something to eat & ma spred down a bufalo robe & we all laid down on it & spred somthing over us & ma sit up by the fire & it snowed one foot on top of the bed so we got up in the morning & the snow was so deep we could not go over & we had to go back to the cabin and build more cabins & stay thar all winter without Pa we had not the first thing to eat Ma maid arrangements for some cattel giving 2 for 1 in callifornia we seldom thot of bread for we had not any since I remember & the cattel was so poor they could not git up when they laid down we stoped there the 4th of November & staid till March and what we had to eat i cant hardlev tell vou & we had that man & Indians to feed to well they started over a foot and had to come back so thav made snowshoes and started again & it come on a storm & they had to come back it would snow 10 days before it would stop they wated till it stoped & started again I was a going with them & I took sick & could not go. there was 15 started & there was 7 got throw 5 weman & 2 men it come a storme and they lost the road & got out of provisions & the ones that got throwe had to eat them that Died not long after they started we got out of provisions & had to put matha at one cabin james at another Thomas at another & Ma and Elizia & Milt Eliot & I dried up what little meat we had and started to see if we could get across & had to leve the childrin O Mary you may think that hard to leve theme with strangers & did not now wether we would see them again or not we couldnt hardle get a way from them but we told theme we would bring them Bread & then they was willing to stay we went & was out 5 days in the mountains Eliza giv out & had to go back we went on a day longer we had to lay by a day & make snowshows & we went on a while and coud not find the road so we had to turn back I could go on verry well while i thout we were giting along but as soone as we had to turn back i coud hadley get along but we got to the cabins that night & I froze one of my feet verry bad that same night there was the worst storme we had that winter & if we had not come back that night we would never got back we had nothing to eat but ox hides O Mary I would cry and wish I had what you all wasted Eliza had to go to Mr. Graves cabin & we staid at Mr Breen they had meat all the time & we had to kill littel cash the dog & eat him we ate his entrails and feet & hide & evry thing about him O my Dear Cousin you dont now what trubel is yet. Many a time we had on the

last thing a cooking and id not now wher the next would come from but there was awl weis some way provided there was 15 in the cabon we was in and half of us had to lay a bed all the time thare was 10 starved to death then we was hadly abel to walk we lived on a little cash a week and after Mr. Breen would cook his meat we would take the bones and boil them 3 or 4 days at a time ma went down to the other cabin and got half a hide carried it in snow up to her wast it snowed and would cover the cabin all over so we could not git out for 2 or 3 days we would have to cut pieces of the logs in sied to make the fire with I coud hardly eat the hides and had not eat anything 3 days Pa started out to us with provisions and then come a storm and he could not go he cash his provision and went back on the other side of the bay to get a compana of men and the San Wakien [Joaquin] got so hye he could not cross well thay Made up a Compana at Suters Fort and sent out we had not ate any thing for 3 days & we had onely half a hide and we was out on top of the cabin and we seen them a coming

O my Dear Cousin you dont now how glad i was we run and met them one of them we knew we had traveled with him on the road thay staid thare 3 days to recruit us a little so we could go thare was 21 started all of us started and went a piece and Martha and Thomas give out and the men had to take them back Ma and Eliza & James and I come on and O Mary that was the hardes thing yet to come on and leiv them thar did not now but what thay would starve to Death Martha said well Ma if you never see me again do the best you can the men said they could hadly stand it it maid them all cry but they said it was better for all of us to go on for if we was to go back we would eat that much more from them thay give them a little meat and flare and took them back and we come on we went over great hye mountain as strait as stair steps in snow up to our knees litle James walk the hole way over all the mountain in snow up to his waist. he said every step he took he was a gifting Niger Pa and something to eat the Bears took the provision the men had cashed and we had but very little to eat when we had 5 days travel we met Pa with 13 men going to the cabins O Mary you do not now how glad we was to see him we had not seen him for 6 months we thought we would never see him again he heard we was coming and he made some sweet cakes to give us he said he would see Martha and Thomas the naxt day he went in tow days what took us 5 days some of the compana was eating them that Died but Thomas & Martha had not ate any Pa and the men started with 17 people Hiram G. Miller carried Thomas and Pa caried Martha and thay wer caught in storms and thay had to stop two days it stormed so they could not go and the Bears took their provisions and thay were 4 days without any thing Pa and Hiram and all the men started one Donner boy [sentence unfinished] Pa a carring Martha Hiram caring Thomas and the snow was up to thare wast and it a snowing so thay could hadly see the way. thay wrapped the children up and never took them out for 4 days thay had nothing to eat in all that time Thomas asked for somthing to eat once them that thay brought from the cabins some of them was not able to come and sam would not come that was 3 died and the rest eat them thay was 11 days without any thing to eat but the Dead Pa braught Tom and pady on to where we was none of the men was abel to go there feet was froze very bad so thay was a nother Campana went and brought then all in thay are all in from the mauntains now but four thay was men went out after them and was caught in a storm and had to come back thare was another compana gone thare was half got through that was stoped thare thare was but 2 familes that all of them got through we was one O Mary I have not rote you half of the truble we have had but I have rote you anuf to let you now that you dont now what truble is but thank god we have all got throw and the only family that did not eat human flesh we have left everything but i dont cair for that we have got throw with our lives but Dont let this letter dishearten anybody never take no cutoffs and hurry along as fast as you can.



My Dear Cousin

We are all very well pleased with California particularly with the climate let it be ever so hot a day there is always cool nights it is a beautiful Country it is mostly in valleys it ought to be a beautiful Country to pay us for our trouble getting there it is the greatest place for cattle and horses you ever saw it would just suit Charley for he could ride down 3 or 4 horses a day and he could learn to be a Bocado [vaquero] that one who lases [lassos] cattle the Spaniards and Indians are the best riders I ever saw they have a Spanish saddle and wooden stirrups and great big spurs the wheels of them is 5 inches in diameter and they could not manage the California horses without the spurs. they would go away if they can't hear the spurs rattle that have little bells to them to make them rattle they blindfold the horses and then saddle them and get on them and then take the blindfold off and let them run and if they can't sit on they tie themselves on and let them run and if they can't sit on they tie themselves on and let them run as fast as they can and go out to a band of bullheads and throw the reata [riata] on a wild bullhead and put it around the horn of his saddle and he can hold it as long as he wants another Indian throws his reata on its feet and throw them and when they take the reata off of them they are very dangerous they will run after them hook their horses and run after any person they see they ride from 80 to 100 miles a day some of the Spaniards have from 6 to 7000 head of horses and from 15 to 16000 head cattle we are all very fleshy and tall we are 10040 pounds and still gaining I weigh 81 tell Henriette if she wants to get married to come to California she can get a spanyard any time. that Eliza is going to marry a spanyard by the name of Armijo [Armijo] and Eliza weighs 10072 We have not seen Uncle Cadon yet but we have had 2 letters from him he is well and is coming here as soon as he can Mar take this letter to Uncle Gursham and to all that I know to all of our neighbors and tell Dochter Maniel and every girl I know and let them read it Mary kiss little Sue and Maryan for me and give my best love to all I know to Uncle James Aunt Lida and all the rest of the family and to Uncle Gursham and Aunt Percilla and all the Children and O all of our neighbors and to all the girls I know Ma sends her very best love to Uncle James Aunt Lida and all the rest of the family and to Uncle Gursham and Aunt Persila all of the Children and to all of our neighbors and to all she knows. Pa is at Yerba Buena [Yerba Buena] so no more at present

My Dear Cousins
Virginia Elizabeth B Reed





Sarah Winnemucca (Thocmetony) – Another Point of View

Quotations and information from **Women of the West** by Cathy Luchetti & Carol Olwell, Antelope Island Press, Utah, 1982, pp. 103-111.

Sarah Winnemucca was born about 1844, in northern Nevada. She was a member of group of Native Americans called Paiutes (or, as it was spelled in those days, Piute). Her grandfather was a leader called Chief Truckee by the Americans. He guided the Stevens-Murphy Party to Truckee Meadows (now Reno), and from there, to the pass over the Sierras (Donner Pass). Here is her memory of her tribe's meeting the emigrants to California.

Sarah learned English when she lived for a time with a trader's family. Her people lost control of their land and were shuffled from one reservation to another as more and more Americans moved west. Sarah worked as a translator for the Army and tried to speak for her people, despite the fact that she was not paid much. The government broke many of its promises to her people, and often her people blamed her.

Nevertheless, she never stopped trying to correct the injustices her people suffered. She married in 1882 to a white man named Hopkins and established an Indian school near Lovelock, Nevada. She died in Montana on October 16, 1891.

I was born somewhere near 1844, but am not sure of the precise time. I was a very small child when the first white people came into our country. They came like a lion, yes, like a roaring lion, and have continued so ever since, and I have never forgotten their first coming.

My people were scattered at that time over nearly all the territory now known as Nevada. My grandfather was chief of the entire Piute nation, and was camped near Humboldt Lake, with a small portion of his tribe, when a party travelling eastward from California was seen coming. When the news was brought to my grandfather, he asked what they looked like? When told that they had hair on their faces, and were white, he jumped up and clasped his hands together, and cried aloud:

“My white brothers--my long-looked-for white brothers have come at last!”

The next year came a great (pioneer) emigration, and camped near Humboldt Lake During their stay my grandfather and some of his people called upon them, and they all shook hands, and when our white brothers were going away they gave my grandfather a white tin plate -- it was so bright. They say that after they left, my grandfather called for all his people to come together, and he then showed them the beautiful gift which he had received from his white brothers. Everybody was so pleased; nothing like it was ever seen in our country before. My grandfather thought so much of it that he bored holes in it and fastened it on his head, and wore it as a hat. He held it in as much admiration as my white sisters hold their diamond rings or a sealskin jacket.

The third year more emigrants came, and that summer Captain Fremont (who is not General Fremont) ... gave my grandfather the name of Captain Truckee, and he also called the river



after him. Truckee is an Indian word; it means "all right," or "very well." A party of twelve of my people went to California with Captain Fremont. I do not know just how long they were gone ...

That same fall, very late, the emigrants kept coming. It was this time that our white brothers first came amongst us. They could not get over the mountains, so they had to live with us. It was on Carson River, where the great Carson City now stands. You call my people bloodseeking. My people did not seek to kill them, nor did they steal their horses -- no, no, far from it. During the winter my people helped them. They gave them such as they had to eat. They did not hold out their hands and say "You can't have anything to eat unless you pay me." No -- no such word was used by us savages at that time ...

The following spring, before my grandfather returned home, there was a great excitement among my people on account of fearful news coming from different tribes ... there was a fearful story they told us children. Our mothers told us that the whites were killing everybody and eating them. So we were all afraid of them. Every dust that we could see blowing in the valleys we would say it was the white people. In the late fall my father told his people to go to the rivers and fish, and we all went to Humboldt River, and the women went to work gathering wild seed, which they grind between the rocks. The stones are round, big enough to hold in the hands. The women did this when they got back, and when they had gathered all they could they put it in one place and covered it with grass, and then over the grass, mud. After it is covered it looks like an Indian wigwam.

What a fright we all got one morning to hear some white people were coming. Everyone ran as best they could My aunt overtook us, and she said to my mother "Let us bury our girls, or we shall all be killed and eaten up." So they went to work and buried us, and told us if we heard any noise not to cry out, for if we did they would surely kill us and eat us. So our mothers buried me and my cousin, planted sage bushes over our faces to keep the sun from burning them, and there we were left all day.

Can anyone imagine my feelings buried alive, thinking every minute that I was to be unburied and eaten up by the people that my grandfather loved so much? With my heart throbbing, and not daring to breathe, we lay there all day. It seemed that the night would never come At last we heard some whispering. We did not dare to whisper to each other, so we lay still. I could hear their footsteps coming nearer and nearer. I thought my heart was coming right out of my mouth. Then I heard my mother say, "Tis right here!" Oh, can anyone in this world ever imagine what were my feelings when I was dug up by my poor mother and father ?

Well, while we were in the mountains hiding, the people that my grandfather called our white brothers came along to where our winter supplies were. They set everything we had left on fire. It was a fearful sight. It was all we had for the winter, and it was all burnt during that night. My father took some of his men during the night to try and save some of it, but they could not; it had burnt down before they got there.

Those were the last white men that came along that fall. My people talked fearfully that winter about those they called our white brothers This whole band of white people [undoubtedly the Donner Party] perished in the mountains, for it was too late to cross them. We could have



saved them, only my people were afraid of them. We never knew who they were, or where they came from. So, poor things, they must have suffered fearfully, for they all starved there. The snow was too deep

We remained there all winter; the next spring emigrants came as usual, and my father and grandfather and uncles, and many more went down the Humboldt River on fishing excursions. While they were thus fishing, their white brothers came upon them and fired on them, and killed one of my uncles, and wounded another. Nine more were wounded, and five died afterwards. My other uncle got well again, and is living yet. Oh, that was a fearful thing, indeed

My people teach their children never to make fun of anyone, no matter how they look. If you see your brother or sister doing something wrong, look away, or go away from them. If you make fun of bad persons, you make yourself beneath them. Be kind to all, both poor and rich, and feed all that come to your wigwam, and your name can be spoken of by everyone far and near. In this way you will make many friends for yourself. Be kind both to bad and good, for you don't know your own heart. This is the way my people teach their children. It was handed down from father to son for many generations. I never in my life saw our children rude as I have seen white children and grown people in the streets

