Finding Aid of the Black Bart Letters C058347

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Title: Black Bart Letters
Identifier/Call Number: C058347
Contributing Institution: Society of California Pioneers
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 1.0 folder(I handwritten transcription, 36 pages)
Date: 1884
Abstract: A handwritten transcription, dated 1884 in San Andreas, California, of a series of letters between Harry A. Morse of San Francisco and Sheriff B.K. Thorn of Calaveras County, California concerning a dispute between the two men as to who actually arrested Black Bart after his final crime in November of 1883. The letters begin with a request for a clarification as to who should receive the award for his capture, and quickly escalates in a nasty exchange of accusations, insults and threats. Other people involved in the capture are mentioned, as are details of the search and capture - discussed back and forth between the two men. The name "P.O.8" is noted, which was another alias of Black Bart as is a physical description of him and his clothing.

Scope and Contents note
This is a handwritten (1884) transcription of correspondence between Harry A. Morse (San Francisco) and Sheriff B.K. Thorn, Calaveras County, California pertaining to the arrest of C.E. Bolton, alias "Black Bart." This series of letters between the two men begins with a request for clarification as to who is entitled to the reward - $300 - for the capture of Black Bart and quickly escalates into a very nasty exchange of letters filled with accusations, insults, threats and invectives. The robbery, search and final capture of "BB" is discussed back and forth by both men, and Thorn describes his delivery of him to San Quentin prison. Various details are mentioned: Black Bart's handkerchief, his hat, and places details of robbery and arrest, as well as other people involved - one being a Mr. Thacker. The name "P.O.8" is also mentioned, which was another alias of Black Bart. It ends apparently with Harry Morse's letter (transcription) to Sheriff Thorn advising him that if he wishes to pursue this matter, to do it through the newspapers after getting some much needed help. The transcription is handwritten on legal size lined paper and is paged by the first page of a two page grouping of paper - the pages are attached at the top, and writing continues on the back of each page. There are a total of 36 pages of transcribed letters. The first page is headed: San Andreas, Cal. 1884. It is addressed with the following: Harry A. Morse, of Harry A. Morse's Bankers Merchants Manufacturer Police and Fire Patrol, San Francisco, Cal. Even though it is dated 1884 at the top, (this appears to be the date the transcription was made), the beginning of the first letter is dated, 14th day of December 1883. It seems from sources that Black Bart's last crime was November 3, 1883 in Calaveras County, robbing the stage from Sonora to Milton. There is no indication of who made this transcription.

Conditions Governing Access note
Collection open for research.

Conditions Governing Use note
There are no restrictions on access.

Preferred Citation note

Donor
Gift of Louise C. Juda, November 12, 1970.

Biographical note
Black Bart, born 1829 and died sometime after 1888, was born in Norfolk, England as Charles Earl Bowles. Also known as Charles Bolton and C.E. Bolton , he was a gentleman bandit, and was one of the more famous stagecoach robbers to work in and around Northern California and southern Oregon during the 1870s and 1880s. One of 10 siblings, he came to America at the age of two when his parents emigrated to Jefferson County New York. In late 1849, Bowles and two of his brothers went to California and began mining on the North Fork of the American River in California. Bowles returned to New York in 1852, but returned to California one more time, continuing to mine another two years. In 1854, in Illinois, he married Mary Elizabeth Johnson. They had four children, and in 1860 they were living in Decatur, Illinois. He participated in the Civil War, and was discharged in 1865. He went back to prospecting in 1867 - in Idaho and Montana - but his last letter to his wife was in 1871 noting an unpleasant incident with some Wells, Fargo & Company employees. Bowles, who changed the spelling to Boles, committed 28 robberies of Wells Fargo stagecoaches as Black Bart between 1875 and 1883. He was quite successful, and made several thousands of dollars every year. Oddly enough, his robberies were always on foot because he was terrified of horses - and he never fired a gunshot. He was always courteous, and never used foul language. After his final robbery, he was caught, convicted and sentenced to five or six years in San Quentin Prison - shortened to four years for good behavior. He was released in January of 1888 and the last time anyone saw him was on February 28,
1888.

Existence and Location of Originals note
The Society of California Pioneers, 300 Fourth Street, San Francisco, CA 94107.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Black Bart, b.1829
Morse, Harry A.
Thorn, B.K., Sheriff
Bank robberies - California