
Finding aid of the Pierson Barton Reading Diaries C058569

Finding aid prepared by Carolee Gilligan Wheeler

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09/17/2003

Title: Reading, Pierson Barton Diaries

Identifier/Call Number: C058569

Contributing Institution: Society of California Pioneers

Language of Material: English

Storage Unit: B001629

Storage Unit: C058569

Physical Description: 1.0 folder(2 bound journals)

Date: 1843

Abstract: This folder contains: 1) a bound photostatic copy of the original diary kept by Pierson Barton Reading on his overland journey from St Louis, Mo to Monterey, CA from May 15, 1843 to December 20, 1843. The original of that diary is at the California State Library, Sacramento. 2) a bound original handwritten transcription of the 1843 diary, written by Reading in Monterey in 1844 in which follows the format of the original and expands and edits some of the original entries. This journal was sent to Reading's step brother, Philip P. Green in Philadelphia, PA. The original letter of transmittal is bound in the beginning of the journal.

Conditions Governing Access note

Collection open for research.

Conditions Governing Use note

There are no restrictions on access.

Preferred Citation note

Pierson Barton Reading Diaries. The Society of California Pioneers.

Donor

Donor and date of acquisition unknown.

Biographical/Historical note

Pierson B. Reading was born November 26, 1816. He joined the Chiles-Walker party for California in May 1843 and reached Sutters Fort, California in November of 1843. John Sutter soon employed Reading as a laborer and trapper. Reading obtained property in 1844 and named his estate "Buena Ventura". He then joined the California Battalion in 1846, which participated in the Mexican War. He returned to his ranch in 1847 to improve his farming operation. In 1848, Reading discovered gold in Clear Creek and the Trinity Rivers areas. The discovery promoted the settlement of the Shasta area. Reading supported the economy of the area through investment properties and businesses and ran for governor in 1851. He died May 28, 1868 at his home.

Scope and Contents note

The first journal, marked "Journal of Pierson B. Reading, Across the Rocky Mountains to California in 1843," is described by Reading as a "journey of one hundred and twenty three days across the Rocky Mountains from Westport on the Missouri River, four hundred and fifty miles above St. Louis" to California, in 1843. This journal is a transcript written by Reading after the journey was completed, and which he pieced together from his own recollections, using another of his diaries (one held by the California State Library, which is more of a logbook, written during the journey, and of which the Society of California Pioneers owns a photostatic copy) to provide details. This diary and the one held by the California State Library were used to create a narrative published in the Society of California Pioneers Quarterly, vol. VII, no. 3 (1930). Researchers interested in Reading's diaries should first consult this work, as it provides a good account of the journey, in Reading's own words, and is more legible than either of the original diaries. The first half of the diary, beginning May 19, 1843, describes Reading's journey from Missouri with the Oregon-bound Chiles-Walker party. The company traveled as far as Fort Hall, and Reading describes their daily activities, the surrounding countryside, and the native tribes they encountered. On August 29, 1843, Reading and some others left the Oregon company to travel toward the valley of California on horseback. The journal leaves off at this point and is resumed two weeks later, on September 16. Reading states that at this point the company is composed of 13 men with 26 horses and pack mules: Samuel Hensley, Milton McGee, John Myers, Captain John Gantt, William Martin, Charles Bradley, Joseph B. Chiles, Henry Chace, James Williams, John Williams, Isaac Williams, Squire Williams, and Reading. This company experienced much hardship, being unable to procure sufficient rations at the supply forts, finding little water, and being troubled by tribes of natives. They often went for days without food, forced to travel on foot to save the energy of their equally hungry horses. The party arrived at Sutter's Fort on November 10, 1843. After four weeks at Sutter's Fort, Reading sailed to San Francisco; shortly after arriving, he sailed for Monterey. The journal ends in December of 1843.

A note written inside the last page reads, "A portion of this journal has been lost, or mislaid, by others, while out of my hands and has been otherwise mutilated in a dam'd rascally, and unprincipled manner." This note is signed Philip P. Green (Reading's brother). Two letters to Green are tucked into the journal.

Additional Published Materials 1.) Journal of Pierson Barton Reading (1930). Quarterly of the Society of California Pioneers. Vol. VII, no. 3, page 135-198. 2.) Notes on the Journal of P.B. Reading (1932). Quarterly of the Society of California Pioneers. Vol. IX, no. 1, page 67. 3.) The diary and transcription have been reproduced and documented in "The Journal of Pierson Barton Reading Overland to California, 1843" by Madge Richardson Walsh, published by the Association for Northern California Historical Research in 2003, reprinted in 2008.

Existence and Location of Originals note

The Society of California Pioneers, 300 Fourth Street, San Francisco, CA, 94107.

Related Archival Materials note

Folders in the Biography File contain typewritten biographies, newspaper clippings, lists of published materials, a memorial, and typewritten transcripts of both the notes made by SCP Director Philip B. Bekeart (who wrote the footnotes in the work published by the SCP) and the version of the diary that was abridged and edited by his daughter, Alice B. Reading.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Chiles, Joseph B. (Joseph Ballinger), 1810-1885

Reading, Pierson Barton , 1816-1868

Sutter, John Augustus, 1803-1880

Diaries

Overland journeys to the Pacific

Pioneers--California

Pioneers--California--History--19th century

Shasta Dam (Calif.)--History
