Finding aid of the Francis E. Weston Diaries C057694

John Davis/P.Keats
Society of California Pioneers
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101 Montgomery Street, Suite 150
Presidio of San Francisco
San Francisco, CA 94129
pkeats@californiapioneers.org
URL: http://www.californiapioneers.org

Note
B001619/V-7F
Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: Society of California Pioneers
Title: Francis E. Weston Diaries
creator: Weston, Francis E., 1825-1900
Identifier/Call Number: C057694
Physical Description: 2 folders (4 diaries, 1 ledger)
Date (inclusive): 1840-1849

Abstract: These four diaries provide interesting daily journal entries regarding Francis Weston’s preparation and passage from St. Louis, Missouri to California, shortly after the discovery of gold. The diaries span from April 7 to December 1, 1849. Weston recounts details of his travels across the American frontier including the sinking of his boat, cold weather, hunting buffalo, encounters with Pawnee Indians, beautiful natural wonders, and a stop in Salt Lake City. Also included is his account ledger which runs from 1840-1849.

Storage Unit: B001619
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Scope and Contents
This collection of volumes consists of 4 diaries numbered chronologically by date. Three of them are covered in paper while Diary #2 is leather bound. Altogether the diaries consist of 186 pages. The collection also contains one account book started from Bloomfield, Maine on October 29, 1840 and spanning through Francis Weston’s 1849 journey to the Pacific.

These diaries are daily records of Weston’s overland passage from St. Louis, Missouri to California, at the onset of the Gold Rush. Diary 1: April 7-30, 1849 – 18 page, paper covered diary. This diary begins with Weston’s decision to journey to California and ends with his boat sinking on the Missouri River near St. Joseph, Missouri. Weston remains determined despite the setback. Diary 2: April 30-September 9, 1849 – 122 pages, leather bound diary. The diary is a record of Weston’s journey across the American frontier, ending with his arrival in El Dorado County (outside Sacramento, California) Diary 3: September 10-October 18, 1849 – 24 page, paper covered diary. This diary describes Weston’s first few weeks in California as a Gold Rush miner. Diary 4: October 19-December 1, 1849 – 22 page, paper covered diary. In this diary, Weston writes of his days spent tirelessly mining for gold. Account Book: October 29, 1840-1849 – 20 page, paper covered account book. These are personal financial records of Weston’s, beginning in Bloomfield, Maine and spanning through his journey to California.

Also included is a partial typed transcription of diaries 1 & 2, spanning from April 8, 1849 to July 22, 1849. It is unknown when this transcription was made.

Biographical / Historical
Francis E. Weston (1825-1900) was born in Maine and moved to St. Louis, Missouri in 1846 to live with his Uncle, Increase Sumner Weston (I.S.W.). On Easter Sunday, 1849, just four months after the discovery of gold, Francis Weston decided that he “had better go to California”, so he packed up his belongings and made a quick start on his journey to the Pacific. He had his daguerreotype taken for his mother and secured a $350 loan from I.S.W. On April 13, Weston boarded a boat in St. Louis, only to sink on the 25th and lose a fair amount of supplies. He managed to save all of the mules and the wagon, remaining determined for California, despite the setback. On May 3, Weston noted that the journey was at last underway, although the weather was usually cold and wet. Two days later he optimistically wrote that he was beginning to see the charm in “this kind of life”. By the 13th, Weston reported that he was in good spirits and ready to leave the United States behind, along with his former life. The following trip through America’s frontier resulted in many struggles and adventures. Weston often procured little food or sleep and harsh, rainy conditions made travel difficult. He learned to hunt buffalo and enjoy the “peculiar, wild” taste of their meat. Weston encountered many “Californians” making his same journey as well as native Pawnee Indians. He escaped a prairie fire, overcome illness, and managed his own ailing horse. Weston was awestruck by the many natural wonders like Independence Rock and surprised by the “well meaning” Mormons in Salt Lake City. He eventually met Edwin Bryant, the author of “What I Saw in California”, which Weston read at the onset of his overland passage. Finally, Weston arrived in El Dorado County around August 17-20, 1849, where he mined for some time before eventually opening his own store.

Conditions Governing Access
The collection is open for research

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