

Bisbee Family Gold Field Letters

California State Library
Sacramento, California



Timothy Heald Bisbee (1838-1902)

Pine Grove Dec. 21 1854 Kind brother and sister

I recieved yours mailed of Sept 1 about two ago at the same time one from Olive dated Oct. 22 stating that Tim had lost an arm. Can it be possible! What won't happen to him next? I have written to him directing to San Francisco to the care of A.J. Pope, but have recieved none from him. When I recieved your letter mailed of May 1 I recieved several others one from Lydia dated May 16 saying she had just recieved one from Tim giving her the same directions. You write his letters are to be sent to the care of LG. Page. If you write him soon tell him to direct my letters to Marysville.

At the time I recieved your last I was suffering from the effects of a sore under my right arm similar in nature to a felon. I've had several this season otherwise my health is good. I am now in a vegetable store which Wyman and I have started a this place. I left the ranch about a week ago. We have got about 42000 lbs. or at least started that from the ranch and have about half of it now. It cost 4 cts per lb. for freight distance [and illegible] Potatoes are worth 10 cts here at present, wether remarkably dry and trade dull. There is no snow here & has been no heavy rains this season yet. At this season of the year snow is said to be 10 or 12 ft deep usually at this place. I think Hannah preached me quite a sermon (which is a rare thing in this part of Cal.) and wish'd me to leave the wicked country. Hannah I've not got ready to leave the country yet but am in hopes in one year from this time circumstances will allow me to meet my friends in Maine. However I shall set no time as it is verry uncertain when I shall get ready to go home. You see have to call cold Maine home yet. Solomon I keep from bad company by keeping none at all. Good society is hard to find here. Sunday is used as the greatest business day especially in trade by the best of people in the mountains. At present they suspend business on Sunday in the principle citys.

To Timothy and Moriah

Your father writes me that you are almost grown people. I am in hopes to find a smart young man & woman when I return. Remember now is your best time to get knowledge. Soon you will have to look out for yourselves when you will see the need of learning to do business in an easy & ready manner. Timothy, drop you wildness and tricks now & cling to book that in after life you may not reflect on your time being mispent.

Good day to you all

From your friend & relative A. Heald

Pine Grove Feb. 6 1859

Dear Father

I received yours of Dec. 26 /58 was-Fe e ed-the 3 with pleasure. I was glad to hear that you were all well. I am the same. This will not go from here until! the 15 but I though I might as well commence it now and answer some of your qestions as I can do it at present as well as by and by and besides I have got 2 or 3 more to write. I am going to stop writing so much. I guess I shall have my hands full if have got to write to every body because I happenest to get off the ??? ???. I think you would have made a first rate school teacher if you had appyed yourself to it in your younger days judging from the quantity of your questions.

1 Pine Grove is about north east from Marysville.

2 Aamasa was looking for me some when I came.

3 I think he did know me, but wouldn't under the circumstances.

4. I think I should known him.

5. He received your letter about a week before I arrived. It was misscarried or he would got it before he did.

6. I have received 2 letter from you and one from Mother

7. Pine Grove is not on any large river, It is about half way between the Feather and Yuba rivers. Slate Creek is about half a mile from it and some four hundred feet or so below it.

8. I worked for A about a fornigh when I first went to work have not worked for him any since but have been to work at his hill dames the past week. The name of the company to which he belongs is Lone Star Co.

9. I am neither diding gold or preparing but at the Lone Star they take out about one load of pay dirt to three of grave! (??? dirt they call it) stones and bed rock. I will give you a discription of the dames at some futur day.

10. I think I shall like very well if I can make money fast enough. That makes people like almost anywhere you know.

11. We live first rate only we have to cook it ourselves which I don't think much of, but guess I can get along with it.

12. My blankets come in play every night.

13. It is not very cold here. The thamometer ranges from about 20° to 600 (above of coars a most of the time. It was down to 90 one morning the first of the winter and they thought they were going to freeze to death ???

14. Our cabin (camp you call it) is about one half mile from our work when we work at the Lone Star but it is a mile from a dame that Am and I have taken up that we intend working in the spring. It is a surface dame,

15. There is no meeting in this place at present.

16 The sabbath is spent by many by runing about town. It is quite a day for settleing store bills etc

17. I am at work between 60 and 70 feet under ground.

18. It is lighted with candles. Every man takes-has one.

19. The canker in my mouth is better but not well. I hardly think it is a canker. I think it is occasioned by my teeth. I believe I shall have them cleaned in the spring when a good dentist comes up here any how.

20. My boots fit very well and will last as long as I want to stay in Cal. if I don't wear them more than I have, wear rubber boots most. I bought a pair of long legged ones for \$8.00 to wear in Slate Creek. The legs come clear up like trowsers legs. All told.

There I have answered your questions but very poorly. Had you not better hire a hand next summer if you can find a good one and not work so hard yourself? If you cultivate one piece of haps(?) I hardly see how you can get along without some one to help you. Though you might hire by the day I suppose if you chose. Say have you had the line run between you and C-X R yet? I think it's best to hold that land anyhow. When people get to showing the business(?) too much I believe it is best to jump on and ride and if the mule don't 'get up and dust' of course the spurs must be used. "Them's my sentiments". I will write no more at present. You must write often.

From your son T.H. Bisbee

It has been raining all day

Pine Grove Feb. 13 1859

Dear Mother—

Here we come upon the last pages again. You say that mother is borrowing trouble the same as ever. Fear that have not woolen clothes enough to keep me warm etc Why mother! do you expect I am going to suffer for the want of things to keep me comfortable in this land of gold? Comfort comes with me before money and if I did not have clothes enough to keep me warm I should buy some but I have enough at present so you need not borrow any more trouble. A fellow can get any thing he wants here almost. They keep about as good an assortment of things here in the mountains as they do at that great metropolis Buckfield Village.

I had no trouble in getting my trunk through only I had to pay ten cents per pound for every pound over 50. I believe I weighed 54. I had some things in a valise you know. A fellow can carry just as much as he has a mind to look after himself in a valise or any thing else that he can conveniently carry from boat to cars and from cars to boat. Amasa has not given me the toe of his boot yet and I guess he went at present. We get along finely. The weather has been stormy the past week. It rained Sunday and Monday and has snowed every day since though the snow has not fallen so deep this time as it has before this winter. The wind has blown some but not equal to old Maine's winds. Winds are not as heavy here as they are at home.

I have not been doing any thing the past week and don't know when I shall go to work again but proberly before you get this. I some expect to go to work for Am at the Lone Star before long and Am go to work in his dame in Slate Creek if the late rain has washed the tailing out of it so that it will admit of working. It does not pay to work these tailing dames when the tailings are too deep because you have a great amount of tailings to shovel and the gold lays mostly near the bed of the stream so you will get almost as much out of two feet of tailing as out of 4 or

6. I guess I will not write much more this time but come to a close by wishing you health and happiness. I notice in closing your letter you say from your unworthy mother. I wish to ask what great or good act I have done that you are not worthy to be my mother? Give my respects to grandmother and tell her that my shirts hang together first rate.

From your son T. H. Bisbee

[On side]

Amasa sends his love to you all. Says you must excuse his writing now I am here.

Pine Grove Sierra Co. Cala. May 13 1860

Dear Father;

Yours of March 25 was duly received. It appears that you have had a long winter which has -- as is too often the case with Eastern farmers -- caused you to be short of that material which is so closely connected with their prosperity hay. It is bad to be thus situated for t hardly pays to buy and it hardly pays to starve. The first takes all the profits out of the pocket and the later allows them never to enter it from the fact that it takes them so long after to go to grass to recruit and get to the point they should be when first turned out that young cattle do not get so large a groth and old cattle do not get as fat as they otherwise would and conqencely do not bring so large a price.

By this I presume your feeding is over except working cattle and you and Mr. Morrell (must Mr. all married men) are making "buisness ache".

I am yet at work in the tunnel. The air is good now. You think it best to take down a bucket of water — he? When the air was poorest I had all the water I wanted without taking any down. It came down itself right onto a fellow, too, It isn't wet now over head though there is a strates near the bed rock that is very wet but it hurts nothing as the tunnel takes it all out. We are working time shifts in the tunnel now. I work the afternoon shift commencing at between 12 and 1 o'clock and working until about 9 o'clock pm.

We have come to the conclusion to run it back as quick as we can conveniently and then commence work like men and see if cant make something. Eight men have been working in the claims now nearly a year and have taken out only about ten thousand (10,000) dollars. We commenced washing our tailings two weeks ago but owing to the storm have not finished. The prospect is that they will pay very well, proberly \$1000. Perhaps you do not understand about our washing tailings. We wash our dirt twice. The first time we wash it into a correll ie. a dam built round a hollow like on a side hill, that will hold all the dirt we take out in 4 or 5 months after it has been once washed. The dirt being in the correll slackens and conqencely pays well for washing the second time. We have had two snow storms this month. Yesterday morning there was a foot of new snow. Last night water froze one half inch.

I have not drawn a map of our digings yet for you but guess I will sometime though I dont know as you would be able to form a very correct idea from the one of my drawings. Perhaps what I wrote Maria about Amasa caused you to feel uneasy about him. The affair I presume is now forever settled. Casker(?) has been to his woman and confessed that he was wrong etc and she has gone to live with him again. You must say nothing about this for if Am should find out that I had writen any thing about it he might not like it. Hoping that you and and your hired hand may get along pleasantly and well with your work I close and write a few lines to Mother.

From your son Timothy H. Bisbee

Sunday May 13

Kind Mother

I will now try and write a few lines to you to let you know that I well and hope this may find you and my friends in the East enjoying the same blessing. You say that our folks think that you are not in earnest about my coming home. Well I suppose they have a better chance to know whether you are or not than I do consequentially I shall be obliged to allow them their opinion whether it is right or wrong. Well mother the way I put up is that you have taken that coarse to ascertain my view of subject whether it be so or not I give them it in part. As far as I am individually concerned or in other words for my own financial benefit I hardly think I have any particular desire to live at home but should it become actual necessary for the comfort and happiness of my parents I might do so. But let us reason the matter a little. What are you going to do with Lewis? I should think he would be the one to live at home. Hope he has a better disposition than I have. It is true that he is not old enough to go a great deal yet but he is growing evry year and will almost before we know it be able to do a mans work. Perhaps you may say that he will want to go away to that I would say I am already away and have seen enough of the world to believe there is a better place than Maine though I think I could live there better contented than I could before went away from home.

If I could been placed back about six months after I let I presume I should been very quiet for a while. You say hired help wants some one to pick up the ends. I dont know as my coming home would lighten your work much for I dont know as I should be so unspeakable happy as to be able to take any one along with me to work even two days in a week for their board.

Barrows has a pan of dough. He think he make two and a half bushels of doughnuts. He says he is cooking for the army. You ought to see him pitch in and roll them out with a bottle.

I suppose you would like to know what I think of the mines. I think there are about nine chances against a fellow and one for him. There is one thing about it when one gets anything it is in cash but take the miners as a class they would do better on a long run I think farming than they do in the mines. But as long as now and then one can make money fast and nearly all make something there will be plenty willing to take the chances.

The mines of California are not as many suppose nearly exhausted neither will they be in the next fifty years. Quartz mining is destined to become one of the greatest sources of welth in the country.

The silver ore at Washo East of the Sierra Nevada is exciting considerable attention. They are supposed to be the richest silver mines in the world. Claims are selling as high and even higher as one thousand (1000) dollars per foot and even higher. There is a quartz lead bearing gold in Southern Oregon which is called the richest in the world. In fact the mineral wealth of the Pacific coast is not yet one half prespected etc.

My respect to all write often

T.H. Bisbee

[side, page one]:

Barrows wants me to ask you if you know of another place where a man and woman can hire out.

[side, page three]:

How is grandmother. Give my respects to her, I was somewhat surprised to learn that she had been to Paris while it was cold weather. T.H.B.

Pine Grove Jany 11 1862 Dear Sister:

Your letter was duly received which I am right glad to acknowledge. For my correspondants in that direction are getting rather sparse. Although as you have hinted, I have no reason to complain, am inclined to think however that if I did not send our w--card to you direct that I at least gave John orders to hand you one. My short experience of a weded life gives me no reason to complaint but how it is enjoyed by the other party she is at liberty to explain but you must consider there might be a chance for a little delicacy on that point, It seems Julie has anticipated me whilst I have been writing this. She has voluntarily answered the question by requesting me to give her love to you and that she liked both me and the state much better than she expected. It might be concluded that but little was expected as she says the first thing done on apprehending my intention was to promise herself that she would marry me but suppose like the poor Irish woman she was driven to desperation and married me to get rid of me.

I may as well apprise you that whilst the eastern or southern portion of our confederacy is raging with rebellion and made desolate with civil war, the vallies of Cal. & Oregon are made equely desolate by the unprecedented floods which has inundated cities, torn and covered up with tailings (dirt washed from the mts.) ranches and vinyards, swept off & destroyed thousands of cattle, horses and hogs and left the whole country almost one mass of ruin. This flood or the rains commenced about the 8 of Dec. caused by the general rain over the whole country upon the snows in the mts. about 6 ft. of which was carried entirely off at this place. My paper states that on the 18 the Sac. R. was 1 in. higher than it was ever known before this flood though it had been receding most the time since the 1 1 but verry slowly and at that time was over 22 ft. above low water. This week it commenced snowing Mon. night and continued untill Wed night when it turned to rain since which time I never knew it to rain harder though it has now abated a little this Sat. night which no doubt has raised the water in the valley several ft. higher than ever. Our communication for the first time is cut off with Marysville the road between which place and Sac. City (which was one perfect cloud of dust in Aug. when we got to the country) has been traversed by steam boats for a whole mo.

You can tell Solomon that our claims are paying verry well this winter though we have lost the best ground we have found by arbitration which came off soon after I got here and after we had well drained the ground. The arbitrators as in most all such cases making a division and by chance the best part falling to them. Also some of our gold by the freshet which sometimes gives us so much water that we are unable to work ... it has been the case the last three days of this week.

Tim, started for Oregon on the 16 of Dec. but in no direct service of his county. I believe will proably visit Cuting's folks and go out to the new mines if the reports we get from them are one half true. He rather unfortunately for us and carelessly killed our horse a few days before he started and when he left I was below for another and got a mule which have to train myself as the old man refuses to attend her hear. It takes some time to break a "tractible" animal to this business and a mule is a "little too much for the Welchmans constitution".

Byron boards with us. He and Wm does finely at mining. I do not know whether we shall ever be able to make anything of J. Barrett or not. E. Stetson is working at his trade and is doing well. The most important war news we get even here in the mts. since the completion of the telegraph just about as soon as you do in Sumner. Tell Maria her letter to T. arrived last night. ??? opened it according to instructions am happy to learn mother is better. Yesterday I had one from Tim. H. he seems to know nothing about our folks and what he does know not right. Give my love to all and write soon and often if convenient.

From A. Heald

Camp Hardscrable July 20 1862
3 miles from any place in the cot in the valley
I love I love it very badly

Good evening miss Maria

I hope you are enjoying all of the blessing that youth & health is heir to. I suppose that you are teaching this summer are you not if so how does it go. By the way have you any contribands for schollars this summer if so I expect some of the federal officers will see that they trabble the road to knowledge stright as H.

I recd. your letter the first of this month & should have answered it before but for other buisness that was driveing me quite hard at that time & finely until now. Prehaps you would like to know what I have been doing of late. Well last winter Amasa & I bought 2 creek claim & the big freshet that we had last winter distroyed the improvements mostly that was on the claim & he & I have been fixing things up the last 2 weeks in order to get to work as soon as the water got low enough & now I think tomorrow that shall start in to work them with the assistence of a man that Amasa has hired to work with me. Am. is a going to start in to work another creek claim that we have been buying into to morrow I expect. Em. Stetson is a going to work with him so you see that Em. has left the shoe buisness. I think that he will miss it somewhat. He will find mining hard buisness shure but every one to their notion. I want mine & am willing to let others have theirs.

About Tim. I recd. a letter from him about the same time that I recd. yours. I wrote to him the 5 of July & forwarded your letter also or rather enclosed it with mine. He was then at Florence City W.T. in the Salmon River Mines. I think his letter was dated the first of June. He wrote that there was no show at that place for a man that got in there this spring to get any claims that was worth any thing & he & 2 or 3 more I believe was going up the Salmon River some 70 or 80 miles prospecting. He does not like Oregon a bit you bet but I did not expect he would as I know what this deep loamy soil is in rainy weather you bet I do. I have seen it to my hearts content but still if I was a going to make a farm that is the place. What do you think of these old batchlors Maria do you think I would make a good one or am I to cross already. What do you think.

As far as your letters are concerned you need not give yourself any uneasyness concerning them as I have not seen any thing that is out of place to write to any one that you are familiarly acquainted with & far less to a brother but still there might have been some things in them that I did not see as I did not read only 2 or 3 & then I only run over slightly to see how the people in the vicinity were &c &c Speaking of snow this country lets me out. There is snow 20 ft. deep in sight yet some think that it will lay on all this year in sight of this place.

I suppose you will not work for aunt Achsah this summer will you She is a difficult person to get along with but I do wish she could get some girl there that would be a good hand & not take any notice of the old lady but these are hard to find. I hear by the way that John has smashed up his new slish well done for him. What next do you suppose will turn up. I do not think of any thing more now so please excuse all mistakes & charge them to my acct. Please write on the recpt. of this from you know who

C.B. Heald

in a hurry

With drawing on envelope

Fine Grove Jan. 4 1863 Dear Father;

Yours of Nov. 23d has been received. I began to think that I wasn't going to get any more letters from home it being the first I have received since the first of Oct. but I don't wish to complain. I know how it is. You work hard — yes too hard — and when you get leasure don't fell like writing letters and Maria is very buisy too I suppose. I rather hear of her teaching school than working at Granfathers. I think it is too much for her to do all of this work, should think she must rather teach and that they could get some other girl that would do as well as she there. I was sorry to hear that my grand-mothers were so feeble.

My health has been very good since came back. We are having a very bad winter for mining. There is no water to wash with and most of the Cos have their sheds full or nearly so of dirt and are laying off. We have had no rain this fall or snow to speak of untill after the 20 ult. when we had quite a snow storm and we are now having another storm and big one. We can work a little longer when it comes fair weather although we cannot get out dirt much longer. We have found a place in our digings where the bed rock goes down some 40 feet nearly purpendicular and how much further we don't know. As we can not do much elce we think of runing into the pipe clay which is over this pitch off a piece and sink a shaft to see if we can find bedrock and a strater of gravel with Gold in it. This is the high rock I used to write you about instead of the rock going up it goes down. There is a heavy body of pipe-clay and cement raises up where the bedrock goes down and we have run against it several times and called it bedrock.

I believe some of you wrote me that the spiritualists sayed when I first bought into the Lone Star that I shouldn't make much for a while but would strike it when we got back. Now this low place is in our back ground and there is a chance to strike it J there yet. There is a load in this hill about forty feel wide that pays some \$40.00 to \$50. per day and where it was last worked on it was rather making this way but I dont build any very large castles in the air on the strength of that. I would like to have the facts prove such to be the case however.

You say you would think they had been diging long enough to get through in those claims I have bought into in Plumas County. I think so to if they had worked where they ought and not had so much boys play. The Co. have run 3 tunnels one below the other and all on the long side of the mountain. The first was run in a short distance way up side of the mountain. The second run in 600 feet and the third 75 feet lower is in 1300 feet and I think if it was in 700 more it would be in gravel. Since I have bought in we have quit work in that tunnel and started one about half a mile around the mountain from it in a much better place to run into the mountain and where we hope to get pay by runing 1000

feet. Some think we will have no hard rock but I think it is doubtful about that. H.C. Adams is working there this winter. I have not heard from there for about a month.

I am rather discontented lately and if it wasn't for going home I don't know but I should go to Oregon in the spring and buy some mill property but I know if I go up there that I can't get home for some time and if I stay here I hope to in a year, two at the outside.

Oregon is bound to be a flourishing state at no very distant day with here gold mines in the eastern part of the state, and her other mineral resources. I do not see how she can help being a flourishing state. There is rather too much rain and fog there in the winter to be agreeable but I believe I rather like there than here or in the most places in this state.

I was sorry to hear that Jimey Heald was no more among the living. This rebellion has sent many a one to his long home and I am afraid will many more before it is put down. It appears that Burnside didn't do as great things when he overtook the rebels on the Rappahannock as you expected. It seems to me [written sideways] that there is something wrong in the management of affairs some where. I don't see what Butler was superseded for unless he is to have an important command somewhere else.

[Continues cross-wise on first page]

Give my respects to all inquiring friends. Tell Grandmother I would like to see her and hope I may yet. Tell Maria not to do too much housework and to write me once in a while. Tell mother not to fret much as that is the hardest kind of work. And Lewis that I will answer his note sometime and that he must write again. Our snow storm has turned into rain and we may have water yet.

T.H. Bisbee

[Sideways on page 2]

I was at Potosi and stayed with Barrows the other night. He is fat weighs 196 lbs. and still gaining.

[Sideways on page 3]

Byron & I are living together this winter.

Pine Grove Dec. 29 1865

Dear Parents:

Yours of Nov. 3d was duly received, have neglected to answer until the present partly because I was busy at work and partly to answer your question respecting the Northern Star. I returned from there yesterday. We have got no prospect there yet and I don't know as things look any more favorable for diggings than they did a year ago yet we are going on and in hopes to strike something by and by. I am quite positive there are good diggings there but we may never find them. Think if I had my money out of there I should keep it out but it is hard telling what I should do. Just now I have rather got the blues and in fact I have been down on the country ever since I came back. Think if I can ever get settled up that I shall get up and travel. I have been working for a company ever since got back with the promise of \$3.50 per day and grub. But I got pretty good board and hold my own pretty well. Still weigh my regular 160 lbs.

Byron is at San Francisco. We talked some of taking machinery north and going into the cabinet business. But machinery is very high and it is very doubtful about our doing it now. By is talking some of going into business at the bay.

I was glad to hear that you were well and that the products of the farm brought a good price. It seems that fat sheep are in good demand up under the mountain — just as I expected -- They say that fat sheep are also in good demand at the northern mines and C. Barrett & the Adams boys think they will make a good thing by such being the case. I don't know whether you will be as fortunate by the demand in your vicinity or not. Doubtful I think. I am writing at the old cabin. Wm. Heald has just been in. He is now at work at the Lone Star. He has not been at work much the time since I came back is not as steady as I wish he was. He is too easily influenced for his own good.

We have had considerable cold weather but not much snow. It is good sleighing now but not many sleighs. The stage comes in every day on runners. J.S. Barrett is shoemaking. L. Ford is at work mining. He talks of going east in the spring if he gets settled up and he probably will. He goes back to stay. E. A. Stetson is at work at his trade. He is the best shoemaker in this part of the county and has all he can do. I took supper with Mr. Barrow & wife last night. He is working in his claims. She appears very well contented but think she would not like to live always in the mountains.

I am not working this week. Thought I would take it easy between Christmas & new years. I don't know as it makes much difference whether I work or play. I have got to get into some business where I can have something to look after before I can be contented but I don't want to start [cross-wise on first page] into anything more here. Write often and keep me posted on things at home. Give my respects to all inquiring friends.

T.H. Bisbee