

TAPE #36MURIEL THEBAUT

Taped: April 1979

Subject: From a Young Lady's Diary---Volcano 1855-1862

The days of the Gold Rush in California have long been written about and talked about with action words, exciting verbiage like: gold rush! strike! Eureka! gold fever! The life and times of the gold rush was as complex as today. A composite of day by day plain living. ^{As} ~~XXX~~ this diary of a young lady will show. It begins: Dear diary---August 1855---San Francisco---My decision having been firmly made, I forthwith have had dear Felix arrange riverboat passage to Sacramento and stage line accomodation to Volcano. Fall rains will be early this year they say; weather or no I am enthusiastically on my way! and soon! My fears also have been allayed by dear friend Dr. Felix regarding my travelling alone to the mountains of the gold country. And he assures me that friendliness is the byword, and chivalry is not dead among men. He is a most charming and gallant and remarkable man; the most remarkable I have met since my beloved Henry. He has the distinction of haveng written the first book in the english language published in San Francisco in 1849, before California became a state, and I have read it. It is called CALIFORNIA AS IT IS AND AS IT MAY BE. This work is considered a most accurate account of the living conditions and physical dæscription of this glorious new state, and is truthfull and a practical guide for those desirious of contributing their skills for its orderly ~~growth~~ growth.

Dr. Felix Weinzibicki is a Polish exile and was a practicing physician in Providence, Rhode Island when the Mexican War broke out, and the slogan FREEING CALIFORNIA appealed to him, and he joined Colonel Stevenson's New York Regiment. After the war he mustered out in San Francisco and resumed his medical practice. He made a brief journey to the mines; more to observe life than seek a fortune, and from that brief sojourn came his ideas for his book. I met him through mutual friends of my late husband. I was about to return to Philadelphia, and I turned to Felix for council and reassurance. Under the stress of my recent widowhood I needed help desperately to make a decision about my future. And here is Felix asking, what can you do if you remain in California? And my answer was, amazingly swift as I look back to that ~~challenging~~ challenging moment, I can teach! I replied confidently. So Felix set my course: Remain in California, my dear, it needs good, hardy women to help mold its new society. He elucidated, telling me of a place, a town, where folks were genteel and establishing an agreeable, polished community. You can teach there; you are needed. The state public school has just been instituted, and this is the year of great beginnings. As I contemplated his urging, my thoughts turned to my mother. She had such strong support for her friend Abigale Adams in her declaration to her husband, President Adams, that it was high-time men paid attention to the needs and talents of women. And mother always chuckled when she recalled Abigale's threat for a woman's rebellion, and the President ridiculing that threat, and calling it the despotism of the petticoat!

But mother was as staunch as Abigale in ~~beliving~~ believing women should be recognized for all their abilities and be allowed to persue them. And now, in this strange, new land, I find a man who supports my ability to fend for myself; a pioneer woman, to go down in history as Felix predicts. My decision is made! I will be a dedicated, pioneer woman!

September--1855--A new like is before me. It is a bright, golden autumn. The nip in the air is not unlike fall in Philadelphia; shall I ever see that home again? ~~Y~~

The Bell

The riverboad trip on the Schooner ~~XXXXXX~~ was lovely, the scenery so lush and peaceful. Indians along the shore waved, and the children danced on the bank as The Bell slowly ~~plie~~ plied her course. One pastoral day on the river, and I awoke to Sacramento's bustle at ll the next morning. We disembarked, and I stood bewildered for a few moments. Stage coaches, freight wagons, and an array of characters I could hardly have imagined, were a medley of activity before me. I was wearing black; the Volcano drover was supposed to recognize me in that. And as I stood in the thinning crowd, a fabulous character approached me. He was wearing a gaudy, magenta ~~waxxxxxx~~ waistcoat, an immense gold mugget fob, a white plug hat and white gloves. His speech and gestures were dramatic and unforgettable. Burk Wooley, mam, with a sweep of his hat to his knee, Buyam & Co. opposition stage line, Volcano bound! I am the stage dandy of the line, mam, and I'm at your service! And he unwound from his elaborate bow, and took my arm and ensconced me in a most immaculate coach. I was surprised to be his only passenger.

There'll be plenty more, he assured me, as he carefully loaded my valises and bags. At the stop at Sutter's Fort the stage began to fill; no other ladies yet. A pleasant young gentleman sat beside me. He engaged me in conversation immediately; not rashly, but with personable friendliness. He asked my destination, and I told him. And he was also bound for Volcano, his home. He had just been elected assemblyman from the new County of Amador, and that day he had been elected Speaker of his Peers. He was so immodestly pleased. I, though amused, enjoyed his braggadocio. He introduced himself: James Farley, recently become a lawyer, having read the law with Judge Marion Gordon of Volcano, acclaimed as one of the states most astute jurists. I told him my husband had been a lawyer, and somehow we felt a bond, even though we had so soon met. I asked about this superintendent of schools, Mr. Goodin, who had hired me on Felix's recommendation. What was his attitude toward women? Well, Mr. Farley was reassuring. He spoke enthusiastically of Volcano; it was a most special place. Its residents at settings, His hints of Utopian qualities intrigued me as they amplified Dr. Felix's beautiful description. Mr. Farley claimed that there was so much talent lying around loose, that it was hard to believe until you lived with it. Volcano is a way of life; not the usual mining town. As I plied him with ^{why} ~~why~~, how and what, Mr. Farley, obviously enjoying my audience, was expansive. Volcano is the first town in which the ~~immigrants~~ immigrants arrive off the strenuous Carson Pass. It is a haven with its seclusion and beauty. The enterprising merchants set up shop to provide all the necessities for the weary traveller, and they became the permanent nucleus of a thriving mercantile and mining community. Their hotels,

restaurants, bakeries, butcher shops, livery stables, pasture, produce of the good farmers and all the professions abound.

In the year 1856 the population, Mr. Farley explained, would be more than 6000, with daily mail service and telegraph service. He spoke, not unhappily, over Volcano's small political defeat by Jackson, losing the county seat by 53 votes. But, he offered, being the cultural center of the county pleases as much. Heed my words, young lady, I am the voice of Volcano's soul!

I am heeding them, Mr. Farley.

The rough roads were certainly more tolerable because of Mr.

Farley. Passengers came aboard at Live Oak City and Cooks Bar.

Separate Michigan Bar was welcome, but the saloon seemed ~~filled~~ filled with gambling rowdys. It was dusk and the sunset colorful.

The coach was more crowded now, but our conversation was uninterrupted. Where are the people from that live and work there?

A surprising answer: It is a completely Anglo-Saxon community, by design! A prejudiced community, some say. But it is the most enterprising, prospering in the county. There are 210 homes unsurpassed by Sacramento or San Francisco.

The coach stopped at a charming hamlet, Willow Springs. A few passengers left, shaking hands with Mr. Farley and congratulating him.

We are in Amador County. The Sierra are quite close; so glorious in the clear, cold hue of the evening. I was so weary, and Mr. Farley sensed this, as I so quietly remarked about the nondescript fellow passengers, and he whispered in reply, never fear, they're not Volcano bound, they couldn't survive our cultural climate.

And I dozed off between there and Fiddletown. And then over the ridge to Volcano by morning.

October and November--1855--I've been ~~XXXX~~ ensconsed in the Levi Hanford home. Such a fine, well educated family. I am overwhelmed by the welcome of this town. The public school is starting its first year, and I am teaching with Mr. Estee and Mr. Tackaberry. Both are of college, said Mr. Farley, and in the budding legal fraternity of 16 lawyers here. They ~~gave~~ gave me a picture of the dissention between the more aristocratic families and the general populace. There are two private schools: Miss Hoyt's Female Seminary and Mr. Hoyt's Boys School. They are attended by children ~~whom~~ whose parents object to the close ~~XXXX~~ association with the hoi polloi. Mr. Farley invited me a debate recently of extraordinary dimensions. The Green Horn Lyceum debated and resolved that it would be policy for the government of the United States to abolish capital punishment. This topic, while the miners' lynch law seems incontrovertible. But Mr. Farley, as usual, explains Volcano's ~~XXXX~~ ^{minds} are inovative. A Mr. Millington has a weekly dancing class at Mahoney Hall, a jolly event, as also are the brass band concerts and the many socials. My days are filled with work and wonderful outings and many new friends.

Dennis Townsend, a teacher from Fiddletown, has invented a folding world globe, so ingenious it has its own stand, and all folds flat to be carried in a student's geography book.

Another amazing young man is George Madeira, who helped guide his father's 100 wagon train across the continent, in 1853, with his home-made telescope. He ~~was~~ ^{is} writing treatises on the geology and botany of the county.

He and his mathamatics professor are planning to build a small observatory, imagine!

An amusing but ~~sexier~~ scholarly soul in my circle is from Philadelphia, Professor George Horn. He has become a rather too ardent admirer. He greets me as he comes calling in the evening, so formal, with his gloves, bowler and bouquet. Here's your absent minded kin-folk, mam. I must never, never laugh at him, the Lord forgive, but he is excentric. He has just published an extravagantly long philosophy book and sent copies to the President, all the monarchs and potentates of the world. Thomas Springer is the ~~sexier~~ editor of the Volcano Weekly Ledger, and as caustic a wit as any, but he has a poetic ~~side~~ side I admire. And he loves all of natures beauty---the people, the lusty ones and the gentle ones of the community. He claims that brilliant minds are legion here because there is, quote, an elixir in the air. I shall miss him, for soon he becomes the first state printer and leaves for Sacramento.

I have become aware of a lonely young man, Robert Beth. He started a circulating library some years ago which grew to be the Miners' Library Association, with 25 cents monthly dues and a program. He belongs to the Volcano Thespianx Association also. I would like to gain courage to apply for membership in the theater group, for there are only two striplings of boys who play the womens role.

The chamber music of the Fabian family is creating a classical music coterie here ~~where~~ that is unbelievable.

The New Years Eve balls at the ~~Empire~~ Empire House are gala ~~and~~ affairs and elegant. I have attended with a more faithful escort, John Doble, a carpenter and a miner from Indiana. He is a good man and so shy. He has a lady friend, Lizzie, with whom he corresponds and seemingly loves---and has never seen! He seems too slow for a real romance.

In 1856, in later years, the diary goes on: The holidays have all gone and work goes on with much pleasure. Dr. Felix is pleased with my adapting to this community. We correspond regularly.

I have assured him that this was the great decision of my life.

I am useful and learning so much. The feud between the public and private schools has resolved itself well, with the private schools now gone, and the children are most happy with this.

Mr. Mahoney has refurbished his Eagle Theater, which now seats 500. And a Mr. E.B. Love of Sacramento has just opened the Union Square Theater, which is larger than the Eagle. The opening play was Richelieu by Bulwer-Lytton. Later, the National Circus played there and another lawyer friend of mine, Bunker-Hill Gale, Esq., escorted me. He was born at the foot of Bunker Hill, hence the nick-name he gave himself. He's a droll companion.

The entertainment in this town is superior. My work and friends are fulfilling and seem to make the years fly. Romance? I try to hush my heart, for my dear Felix will forever mourn the loss of his devoted wife, and be the dedicated doctor. My heart hopes in vain.

Essentially, I'm content with life and with work. My teaching contract is always renewed. I have an outdoor art and music program,

and the harmonies of nature are still bountiful despite the mining. The birds and the animals are interesting, the wild flowers prolific. The early naturalistic explorers, Brewer, Douglas, Nuttall would all still find treasures in these woods.

I have joined the theater company, and joined with my friend Belle. We revel in our roles as the fallen women of the town, and balance our characters by singing in the Methodist choir. The pony express has caused much excitement, and I asked Bert Wooley if he was joining. And with his usual irreverence, he replied, I could only reply with a small part of their oath: I do hereby swear. He claims he speaks two languages: English and Profane! In June of 1861 George Madeira and Mr. Talleraud made history by sighting the comet, 1861, the second before any other astronomers in the state.

1862---Dear diary---This is the year for decision once more.

I quote James Russell Lowell from his poem THE PRESENT CRISIS:

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide

In the strife of truth with falsehood for the good and evil side.

The ~~ominous~~ ominous truth is that the war between the states

is here in California in Volcano. Our lives are being torn

asunder by the impact of the urgency for gold for the cause,

be it Lincolns or the Confederates. The crescendo of the ~~hydraulicizing~~

hydraulicizing is a crescendo of chaos; every acre is being

devastated whether gold-bearing or not. The population is over

10,000. Frantically men our inundating our orchards, shifting

stream forces, stripping the forests for their sluice-runs and Mr.

Halstead's famous potato patch is washed into the mud on

shirt-tail bend. Every stage leaves filled with patriots for either

side, and the stages only carry men of the owners political persuasion.

People are confused. The state legislature almost voted California neutral; only 7 newspapers in the state are for Lincoln. The commander of the state militia is a southerner, Mr. Albert Johnston, hence, the militia is wearing grey. The Volcano militia wears blue. Dr. Felix sends word that he has arranged Reverend Thomas Starr King's itinerary, which will include Volcano. Starr King is Lincoln's voice in California, the grand orator for the Union. His coming is awaited with mixed emotion.

One week later---Starr King has come and gone. A disappointing figure of a man; frail, young, homely---and then he spoke. His voice is deep and mellow; his language strong and beautiful. His great intellectual and spiritual power reached us, moulding opinion and demanding decision, besides exhorting us to support the cause of right---the cause of Lincoln. He feverently appealed for funds and volunteers for the U.S. Sanitary Commission. Lincoln had appointed a great lady from San Francisco, Jessie Benton Fremont, to organize the volunteer work. Men for building hospital shelters, women for nurses and doing other necessary war-tasks in the field. Starr King brought her plea for strong, dedicated women to join her in this humanitarian work. And he shouted to the crowd: We must give gold, we must give of ourselves, and we must astonish the angels with our charity!

After his visit the town was strangely quiet, for several days. And then the great exodus of young and old men. I was writing Dear Felix of another personal decision, sensing his approval as I write.

letter

A messenger interrupted me with a ~~letter~~ from Starr King, Felix had died, while he was speaking in Volcano. I was so stunned, so desolate in my grief, I almost overlooked the remainder of his letter: Volcano is the most generous of all the communities on his last trip, and Starr King had ordered a bell for the methodist church in gratitude. I replied immediately to him: I have decided to astonish the angels! I am joining Jessie Fremont. My prayers are for Felix and you, Starr King, and for Lincoln and myself.

Later that week---July 1862---As Volcano becomes part of my past I realize I ~~lived forward~~ lived fully in its glorious hey-day. I travelled its Parnassus; now the road of its destruction. War creates many wastelands besides battlefields. Ironically, dear diary, word has just been received that Starr King's ~~give~~ gift of gratitude to the town has arrived on the levee in Sacramento. I will ride the stage with three staunch, Volcano Blues, who will pick up the bell, and I will embark for San Francisco on that schooner, William McGill, that brought the bell. Burk Wooley, my ~~favorite~~ faithful friend, and best stage-coach dandy, will drive the stage. I have made two requests of my soldier companions, upon their return to Volcano. First--- to ring the bell, once, for me. And second---post these lines of John Donne, as a bulletin to ~~all~~ all in Volcano:
Never ask to know for whom the bell tolls.
It tolls for thee.

Perhaps a hundred years from now that bell should toll again over the town risen like phoenix from the ashes

to excite the hearts and minds of men and women once more.

My hope for thee, Volcano---farewell!