

**California Dreamin':
The Pioneer Valley and the Gold Rush**



A Research Inventory

**by Cliff McCarthy
for the Pioneer Valley History Network**

**With funding provided by
Mass Humanities**



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Introduction & Acknowledgements

When Swedish immigrant John Sutter, decided to build a sawmill near his fort in the California wilderness, he changed the world. When James Marshall, a foreman at that mill, stooped to pick up a shiny, metallic pebble from the streambed, he had no idea of the ripple effect. Marshall pocketed the rock and later took it to the camp washerwoman, Jennie Wimmer, who, having lived in the gold mining regions of Georgia, knew all about gold and fool's gold and how to test the rock. She placed the ore in her lye-filled bucket of soap while it cooled and, when they found the pebble at the bottom of the bucket shining away like no tomorrow, she knew they had the real thing. Jennie Wimmer leaked the story and the news trickled out, eventually reaching the ears of a storekeeper, newspaper owner, and sometimes-Mormon named Sam Brannan. Brannan immediately calculated that a gold rush might improve his business prospects. When he took a bottle of gold dust to San Francisco, where he stood on a corner on Portsmouth Street on May 12, 1848, and proclaimed loudly, "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River," it's doubtful that even Sam Brannan could have foreseen the forces he unleashed.

For those who are fascinated by such things, this seemingly unpredictable, random event still boggles the mind. For the California Gold Rush had an enormous impact on American history: on the slavery debate and the impending Civil War, on the economies of California and the United States, on the treatment of Native Americans, on the treatment of immigrants and immigration policies, on the development of the railroads and other technologies. Perhaps, most importantly, it affected the nation's self-image – within a few short years, America was bi-coastal – and our western boundary was no longer a vague, unknown frontier, but a defined place inhabited by lots of people like their New England neighbors. It became the nation's "manifest destiny" -- even its duty -- to fill the places in between with American "civilization."

Many pioneers from western Massachusetts played important roles in the development of California, and many of those who returned to New England built on their western adventures to achieve positions of stature and importance in our communities. But it is impossible to tell that story within the context of a single town or museum. The experiences of those adventurers were different: they took different routes to California, their ambitions were different, they had varied levels of success and failure, and their lives after the gold rush were different. To get a more complete picture, one needs to examine a wider spectrum of experiences.

This project has developed a tool for researchers who want to see the California Gold Rush in this regional context. Using the connections of the Pioneer Valley History Network, we have created an inventory of the known objects, documents, and images related to the experiences of western Massachusetts pioneers to California. For this project, we defined the Pioneer Valley – a designation that did not exist in 1849 – as encompassing the three counties along the Connecticut River: Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden. We also limited the timeframe to between 1849 and 1857. The "Gold

Rush Inventory Forms” contain the information gathered on each item. Accompanying each form is additional information, intended to place each item in context.

If we believed, at the beginning of this project, that we could produce a complete inventory of every object, document, or image, that belief proved naïve. For even as we complete this draft, new information is coming forth. A few historical societies and museums failed to respond to our inquiries. Many have not catalogued their collections in a systematic way, and so rely on the memories of their knowledgeable curators as to what of relevance might be in their collections.

Still, the outcome of our efforts is impressive. Nearly fifty locations and several private individuals were contacted; twelve different locations are represented in this inventory. We found unpublished diaries, journals, and memoirs. We located scores of letters. We found objects of interest. And we found delightful images -- from ambrotypes to portrait paintings -- of these stalwart men, women, and children.

Certainly, there is more to be found, but this inventory should be a starting place for future researchers.

* * * * *

In performing the task of developing this inventory, the author worked with three students from the Public History Program at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst: Cheryl Harned, Kayla Haveles, and Anthony Martin. Their assistance was essential to this project’s outcome. Thanks also go to Marla Miller for her support of the Pioneer Valley History Network.

Many people at the locations we visited deserve special thanks, as well. They include David Bosse, Shirley Majewski, and Sheila Damkoehler at the Pocumtuck Valley Historical Association in Deerfield; Maggie Humberston at the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum in Springfield; Tevis Kimball at the Jones Library in Amherst; Kate Deviny and Susan Kingra at the Westfield Athenaeum; Barbara Pelissier at the Westhampton Historical Society; Linda Abrams at the Longmeadow Historical Society; Rob Cox at the W.E.B. DuBois Library at UMass; Diane Brenner at the Worthington Historical Society; Muriel Shippee at the Buckland Historical Society; the folks at the Stone House Museum in Belchertown and at Historic Northampton.

Several individuals gave assistance in finding “leads” and providing information. The author would like to thank Dennis Picard, Pat Odiorne, Rob Keyes, Bernie Lally, Ralmon Black, and Stephen Mitchell for their help.

Lastly, this project was funded by a grant from Mass Humanities, a state-based affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and their support is much appreciated.

Objects

Model Gold-Washer of Enoch Burnett

Stone House Museum, Belchertown, MA
PVHN-09-01

Biographical Information:

Enoch Burnett (1826-1913), a Belchertown native, went to California aboard the *Drummond* in February 1849 and was in California from 31 August 1849 to 1 August 1850. There, he and a partner manufactured “gold washers” for sale to the miners. He returned to Belchertown, where he worked as a carpenter and building contractor for nearly thirty years. He served the town as treasurer, assessor, selectman, and in other capacities. In 1866, Enoch Burnett married Mary A. Cheney of Bernardston and they had eight children. He also lived in Springfield for a short time.

Description:

This is a model gold-washer, made by Enoch Burnett, probably as a salesman’s sample. A gold-washer was a cradle-type device used for separating gold from sediment. This item has several parts, including a stand, the cradle with handle, the sediment box, plus a model pick-axe and shovel.

Image:



Gold Rush Inventory Form

Document/Object Name: **Model Gold Washer of Enoch Burnett**

Location: **Stone House Museum, Belchertown, Hampshire Co., MA**

Collection:

Category: Document Object Image

Catalog #: **90-2258**

Accession #: **old #294**

Source: **Enoch Burnett**

Received date: **pre-1903**

Catalog Date: **2005-05-03**

Cataloged by: **Gretchen E. Bock**

Condition:

PVHN Inventory #: **PVHN-09-01**

PVHN Inventory Date: **2009-01-03**

Inventoried by: **Cliff McCarthy**

Description: **This is a model gold-washing cradle, made by Enoch Burnett, probably as a salesman's sample. The item has several parts, including a stand, the cradle with handle, the sediment box, plus a model pick-axe and shovel.**

Date of Creation: **1849**

Year Range:

Height: **6.5"**

Width: **14"**

Depth: **11" (when assembled)**

Weight:

Material: **wood, metal (perhaps tin)**

Creator: **Enoch Burnett**

Condition Notes: **excellent condition**

Inscription Information (type, technique, language, etc.):

Attached card states: "Model California 1849 Gold Washer. Manufactured by one who was there."

A second card, handwritten, says: "Model of a Gold Washer, made & used by Enoch Burnett when in Cal. Presented to the Historical Society of Belchertown by the maker."

Provenance Information (collector, collection date, site, place of origin, etc.):

This object was first inventoried in 1903-04 in the "Catalogue of Articles Given & Loaned to Belchertown Historical Society." The entry for object #294 states: "Model of Gold Washer, made and used by Enoch Burnett when in California, presented to the Historical Society by the maker. Bags used for gold dust."

Related Items: **PVHN-09-02, PVHN-09-29, PVHN-09-32, PVHN-09-33**

Gold Dust Bags of Enoch Burnett

Stone House Museum, Belchertown, Hampshire Co., MA
PVHN-09-02

Biographical Information:

See PVHN-09-01

Description:

These are two leather bags with leather ties, used for storing gold dust.

Image:



(Images courtesy of the Stone House Museum, Belchertown)

Gold Rush Inventory Form

Document/Object Name: **Gold Dust Bags of Enoch Burnett**

Location: **Stone House Museum, Belchertown, Hampshire Co., MA**

Collection:

Category: Document Object Image

Catalog #: **90-2257**

Accession #: **old #294**

Source: **Enoch Burnett**

Received date: **pre-1903**

Catalog Date: **2005-05-03**

Cataloged by: **Gretchen E. Bock**

Condition: **good**

PVHN Inventory #: **PVHN-09-02**

PVHN Inventory Date: **2009-01-03**

Inventoried by: **Cliff McCarthy**

Description: **Two leather bags with leather ties, used for storing gold dust**

Date of Creation:

Year Range: **1849-1850**

Height: **a) 9.0", b) 7.5"**

Width:

Depth:

Weight:

Diameter: **both 2.5"**

Material: **leather**

Creator:

Condition Notes:

Inscription Information (type, technique, language, etc.):

a) the larger bag has "\$1500" and "e burnett" handwritten in ink.

b) the smaller bag has "\$1000" stamped on it and "C Burnett" handwritten on it.

Provenance Information (collector, collection date, site, place of origin, etc.):

This object was first inventoried in 1903-04 in the "Catalogue of Articles Given & Loaned to Belchertown Historical Society." The entry for object #294 states: "Model of Gold Washer, made and used by Enoch Burnett when in California, presented to the Historical Society by the maker. Bags used for gold dust."

Related Items: **PVHN-09-01, PVHN-09-29, PVHN-09-32, PVHN-09-33**

Candle Lantern of Dr. Thomas L. Chapman

**Storrs House, Longmeadow Historical Society, Longmeadow, MA
PVHN-09-03**

Biographical Information:

Thomas Luce Chapman was born on the 10th of February 1817. When his mother, Tabitha, died, his father returned to his native Connecticut, leaving 5 year-old Thomas with Tabitha's sister in Pittsfield. He originally studied to be a missionary, but during a prayer meeting, lightning from a severe thunderstorm shattered the church, burning Chapman and injuring others. It was during his recovery that he was drawn to the practice of medicine. He enrolled in the Berkshire Medical Institute, graduating in 1842. Chapman set up practice in Longmeadow, but was soon off to California. He left on 5 February 1849 in the steamer *S. S. Crescent City* for Chagres and the isthmus of Panama. While thousands of other 49'ers were stranded at Panama awaiting passage up the Pacific coast, Chapman hired on as the ship's physician on the *S. S. Oregon*, bound for San Francisco and arriving on April 1st. By August, he had been elected to serve on the Sacramento City Council, a position which he resigned on the 5th of January 1850 and headed for home, perhaps motivated by the severe flooding suffered by Sacramento in the weeks before.

Once returned to Longmeadow, Dr. Thomas Luce Chapman tended to the care of Longmeadow residents for nearly thirty years. He married twice and his only child, Charlotte "Lillie" Chapman, died shortly before her 6th birthday. His second wife was Mary Dorcas Chapin of Springfield. Thomas Chapman passed away in 1889 and his portrait hangs in the Storrs House of the Longmeadow Historical Society.

Description:

This is a tin candle lantern, once belonging to Dr. Thomas Chapman. The entire object appears to be collapsible, however it was deemed too old to try this. The top props open and the handle collapses. The tin is pierced with figurative designs on the top and with round holes over the arches on the sides. The sides have mica panels.

Note: It is uncertain whether this item is of a vintage consistent with travel to California in 1849. Additional research is necessary to establish its date of manufacture.

Images:



(Images courtesy of the Longmeadow Historical Society)

Gold Rush Inventory Form

Document/Object Name: **Candle Lantern of Dr. Thomas L. Chapman**

Location: **Storrs House, Longmeadow Historical Society, Longmeadow, Hampden Co., MA**

Collection:

Category: Document Object Image Collection

Catalog #: **19XX-506**

Accession #:

Source: **Gift of Mr. & Mrs. William Kaynor**

Received date: **1975**

Catalog Date:

Cataloged by:

Condition:

PVHN Inventory #: **PVHN-09-03**

PVHN Inventory Date: **2009-05-06**

Inventoried by: **Cliff McCarthy**

Description: **This is a tin candle lantern, once belonging to Dr. Thomas Chapman. The entire object appears to be collapsible, however it was deemed too old to try this. The top props open and the handle collapses. The tin is pierced with figurative designs on the top and with round holes over the arches on the sides. The sides have mica panels.**

Note: It is uncertain whether this item is of a vintage consistent with travel to California in 1849. Additional research is necessary to establish its date of manufacture.

Date of Creation: **unknown**

Year Range:

Height: **6¼"**

Width: **2¾"**

Depth: **2¾"**

Weight:

Material: **tin, mica**

Creator: **unknown; there are no apparent maker's markings**

Condition Notes: **fair condition; one isinglass panel cracked**

Inscription Information (type, technique, language, etc.):

Provenance Information (collector, collection date, site, place of origin, etc.):

Gift to the Longmeadow Historical Society from Mr. & Mrs. William Kaynor in 1975.

Related Items: **PVHN-09-21, PVHN-09-22, PVHN-09-23, PVHN-09-30, PVHN-09-36, PVHN-09-37**

Money Belt of Asa B. Clark

Asa Clark Collection, Westfield Athenaeum, Westfield, MA
PVHN-09-04

Biographical Information:

Asa Bement Clark was born in Conway, Massachusetts in 1817. His father, a farmer, died from injuries sustained from falling out of an apple tree when Asa was just fifteen years old. Asa remained on the farm until he attained the age of eighteen, but he eventually achieved admission to Amherst College in 1837. However, his mother died that year and Asa never returned to college. He went to live in Virginia with his sister's family, where he taught school and traveled extensively.

In 1845, he returned to western Massachusetts and purchased an apothecary business in Westfield and, seeing immediate success in this venture, he opened a second drugstore at Palmer Depot, as well. He was well-established in his trade by 1848, when the reports of California gold began to reach the east coast.

He joined the Hampden Mining and Trading Company, which chose the Mexican route, traveling to the mouth of the Rio Grande River at Brownsville, Texas and then across the interior of Mexico to the Gila River in present-day Arizona, and across the deserts to the California coast. After arriving in California, Clark tried his hand at both mining and mercantile interests.

When Clark left California in 1851, he left his store in the care of his brother-in-law, but a fire in Marysville on August 30th of that year destroyed it. If Clark had envisioned returning to California, at some point, those plans now dissolved.

Clark married Margaret Hedges in Westfield on October 15th, 1851, but apparently still had the urge to move, because in the spring of 1853, he packed his young family onto a train and then a stage coach, and migrated to Iowa, to be near his brother Albert. There, Asa studied law and was admitted to the bar. He also joined his brother in a real estate business. After a full life by any account, Asa B. Clark died at Independence, Iowa two days after Christmas in 1882.

Description:

This is a chamois money belt. A tag with the item says: "Chamois Vest and Money Belt worn by a 'Forty-Niner' in the Gold Rush to California in 1848-49. The little pockets were used for carrying gold nuggets." According to Athenaeum staff, the money belt belonged to Asa B. Clark.

Image:



(Courtesy of the Westfield Athenaeum)

Gold Rush Inventory Form

Document/Object Name: **Money Belt of Asa B. Clark**

Location: **Westfield Athenaeum, Westfield, Hampden Co., MA**

Collection: **Asa Clark Collection**

Category: Document Object Image Collection

Catalog #: _____ Accession #: _____

Source: **Given to the Westfield Athenaeum by Mrs. L. E. Pease.**

Received date: _____

Catalog Date: _____

Cataloged by: _____

Condition: _____

PVHN Inventory #: **PVHN-09-04**

PVHN Inventory Date: **2009-05-20**

Inventoried by: **Cliff McCarthy**

Description: **Chamois money belt. A tag with the item says: "Chamois Vest and Money Belt worn by a 'Forty-Niner' in the Gold Rush to California in 1848-49. The little pockets were used for carrying gold nuggets." According to Athenaeum staff, the money belt belonged to Asa B. Clark.**

Date of Creation: **circa 1848-49** Year Range: _____

Height: **14"** Width: **approx. 17" when folded** Depth: _____

Weight: _____

Material: **chamois leather and cotton**

Creator: **no label or maker's mark evident**

Condition Notes: **very good**

Inscription Information (type, technique, language, etc.): _____

Provenance Information (collector, collection date, site, place of origin, etc.): _____

According to the tag with the item, the money belt and vest were given by Mrs. L. E. Pease.

Related Items: **PVHN-09-05, PVHN-09-12**

Vest of Asa B. Clark

Asa Clark Collection, Westfield Athenaeum, Westfield, MA
PVHN-09-05

Biographical Information:

See PVHN-09-04

Description:

This is a chamois vest. A tag with the item says: "Chamois Vest and Money Belt worn by a 'Forty-Niner' in the Gold Rush to California in 1848-49. The little pockets were used for carrying gold nuggets." Athenaeum staff says the vest belonged to Asa B. Clark.

Image:



(Courtesy of the Westfield Athenaeum)

Gold Rush Inventory Form

Document/Object Name: **Vest of Asa B. Clark**

Location: **Westfield Athenaeum, Westfield, Hampden Co., MA**

Collection: **Asa Clark Collection**

Category: Document Object Image Collection

Catalog #: _____ Accession #: _____

Source: **Given to the Athenaeum by Mrs. L. E. Pease**

Received date: _____

Catalog Date: _____

Cataloged by: _____

Condition: _____

PVHN Inventory #: **PVHN-09-05**

PVHN Inventory Date: **2009-05-20**

Inventoried by: **Cliff McCarthy**

Description: **Chamois vest. A tag with the item says: "Chamois Vest and Money Belt worn by a 'Forty-Niner' in the Gold Rush to California in 1848-49. The little pockets were used for carrying gold nuggets." Athenaeum staff says the vest belonged to Asa B. Clark.**

Date of Creation: **circa 1848-49** Year Range: _____

Height: **14 "** Width: **9" folded in half** Depth: _____

Weight: _____

Material: **chamois leather and cotton**

Creator: **no label or maker's mark evident**

Condition Notes: **very good**

Inscription Information (type, technique, language, etc.): _____

Provenance Information (collector, collection date, site, place of origin, etc.): _____

According to tag with the item, the vest was a gift of Mrs. L. E. Pease.

Related Items: **PVHN-09-04, PVHN-09-12**