

USS SHARK

# Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal

VOL. 23 NO. 1

FALL 2012

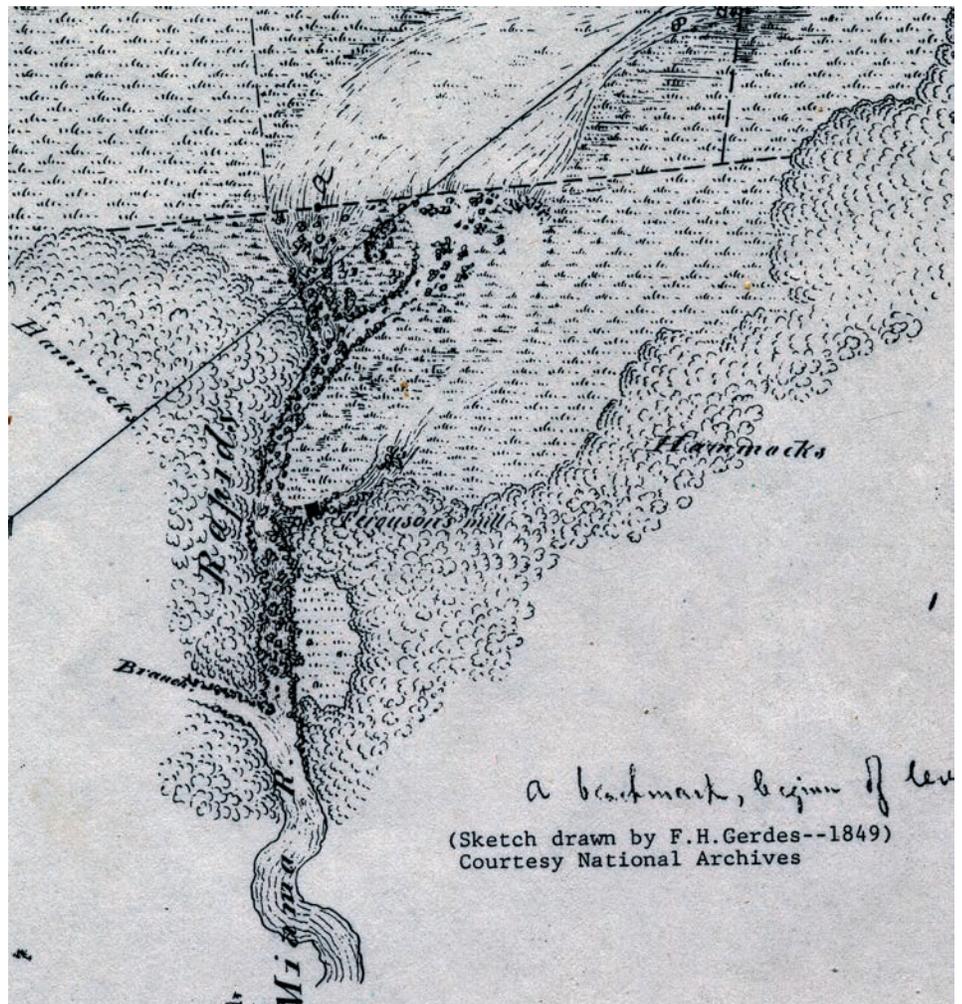
OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Key Wester Strikes Gold

By Mary L. Haffenreffer].  
Copyright 2013

Thomas Jefferson Ferguson was born in New York State in 1814. His name appears on an 1844 Dade County, Florida, list of jurors along with that of his older brother, George Washington Ferguson. The brothers had a homestead and a mill with 25 employees at The Falls on the Miami River. The mill manufactured arrowroot from the wild coontie or compty plant. As the largest enterprise in Dade County, in 1850 it shipped as much as 300,000 pounds of arrowroot via Key West to other American ports. Indian hostilities forced the mill's abandonment in 1852.

Thomas married Rosalinda Corcoran, born and raised in County Monahan, Ireland. As a young woman she worked as a housekeeper. Rosalinda emigrated to the United States in 1832. She lived in Key West with her and Thomas's children: Cecelia, Isabella, and young Thomas. In 1849 Thomas joined the stampede for gold in California. While his wife and children barely survived in Key West, Thomas struck gold, and made further fortunes selling dry goods to the miners, buying large tracts of land in small towns,



*Sketch of the Miami River and Ferguson's Mill in 1849 by F.H. Gerdus. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.*

and making successful investments in others' mining companies. Thomas eventually returned East to enrich his family. Other Key Westers went West to find gold, but we have no evidence

that they met with any success. Sending letters by sea between Key West and San Francisco and Sacramento required much time and great expense. (Thomas mentioned

(Continued on page 3)

SocietyNews  
by Tom Hambright

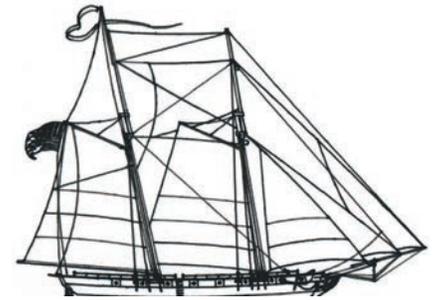
The Ferguson Letters tell the story of one Key Wester and his successful quest to make his fortune in California. The California Gold Rush was one of the events that changed American history. It began on January 24, 1848, when gold was found at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California. The first printed notice of the discovery was in the March 15, 1848 issue of "The Californian" in San Francisco. Shortly after discovery, General John Bidwell discovered gold in the Feather River and Major Pearson B. Reading found gold in the Trinity River. The Gold Rush was soon in full sway. The news of gold brought some 300,000 people to California from the rest of the United States and abroad, including Key West. By 1852, California's annual gold production reached a then all-time high of \$81 million. The effects of the Gold Rush were substantial. San Francisco grew from a small settlement of about 200 residents in 1846 to a boomtown of about 36,000 by 1852. Roads, churches, schools and other towns were built throughout California. In 1849 a state constitution was written, a governor and legislature chosen, and California became a state as part of the Compromise of 1850.

The gold-seekers, called "forty-niners," often faced substantial hardships on the trip out West. Many died crossing Central America or after they arrived. At first the gold nuggets could be picked up off the ground. Later, gold was recovered from streams and riv-

erbeds using simple techniques, such as panning. More sophisticated methods were developed and later adopted elsewhere. At its peak, technological advances reached a point where significant financing was required, increasing the proportion of gold companies to individual miners. Gold worth tens of billions of today's dollars was recovered, which led to great wealth for a few. However, many returned home with little, if anything, more than what they had started out with. Over 27 years ago when I was working as curator for the Key West Art and Historical Society I found the Ferguson letters in a rusty can in the storeroom. No one knew how they got there. The letters tell the story of a man who went West as a "forty-niner" to strike gold and made a fortune not only from gold but from other business ventures, while his wife and family in Key West suffered from sickness and from poverty because of the problem of transferring money across the continent.

Inasmuch as the Society could not display the Letters, the Board of Directors made the decision to transfer them to the Florida History Room at the Library, then overseen by Betty Bruce. Betty, I and others attempted to transcribe and edit the Letters. Mary Haffenreffer has accomplished this, along with original research into the Ferguson family. The next issue of the Journal will publish the rest of the Ferguson Letters and what happened to the family.

members informed of events. To sign-up for email updates go to the web site and follow the link.



The Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal is published quarterly. Subscription is available through membership. Copyright 2013 by the Key West Maritime Historical Society of the Florida Keys, Inc. The art on the masthead, the USS Shark, was drawn by Bill Muir.

Editor: Tom Hambright

Letters and articles are welcome. Please write to: Editor, Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal, KWMHS, P.O. Box 695, Key West, FL 33041 or visit our web site [Keywestmaritime.org](http://Keywestmaritime.org).

Key West Maritime  
Historical Society  
Board of Directors

President: Corey Malcom  
Vice President: Bill Verge  
Secretary: Andrea Comstock  
Treasurer: Tom Hambright

George Craig  
J. Gregory Griffin  
Bill Grosscup  
Mary Haffenreffer  
John Jones  
Sheri Lohr  
Joan Langley  
Julie McEnroe  
John Viele

<http://keywestmaritime.org/>

The Key West Maritime Historical Society maintains a web site, <http://keywestmaritime.org/>, to keep our

(Ferguson from page 1)

a cost of \$10, which, according to [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com) would equal \$304 in 2012 per the Consumer Price Index.) Some correspondence was lost or arrived out of sequence; consequently, the Fergusons sometimes sent duplicate letters to different addresses. Nevertheless, Thomas's and Rosalinda's long-awaited, affectionate letters clearly comforted and encouraged each of them.

The Ferguson Letters are kept in the Florida History Room of the Monroe County Library. What follows is the first installment of my transcription of the Letters, with silent grammatical and orthographical corrections where required for understanding. One of Rosalinda's letters is reproduced on page five, and part of a letter by Thomas is reproduced on page sixteen. Some of Rosalinda's letters are holographs; others are written by one or another amanuensis.

\*\*\*\*\*

*[This letter is from Thomas' brother reporting the condidtions in Panama]*

Charleston April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1849

Brother Thomas,

I have thought it advisable to write you to give you the particulars brought by the Steamer **Northerner** from Chagres [Republic of Panama].

I was conversing with a passenger who went from New York in company with fifteen others. They thought to get passage from Chagres but they found no opportunity to get from there. There is onboard three who bought steerage tickets in New York for \$100.00 for each. One sold at Chagres for \$450.00, one for \$500.00 and the other for \$700.00, and they state that there is 2500 persons on the Isthmus now waiting

for a passage to San Francisco. My informant states that they think that there is a poor chance of the steamers returning from San Francisco and there is no sailing vessels at Panama. He states that he is going to New York to procure tickets if possible to go through, if not to write them to return to New York and proceed around the hook. I would advise you to go by land some route through Mexico if possible. I think we will get from here next week. They are getting every ready as soon as possible.

Remember me to all our friends,

Your Brother,

W. E. Ferguson

\*\*\*\*\*

Havana April the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1849

Dear Wife,

I arrived here at 9 o'clock the next morning after I left home. I learn here that there is two thousand passengers at Panama waiting for passage. I think of altering my route to Vera Cruz and go through Mexico. There is a party here I can join that knows the route and speaks the language of the Mexicans which is of great advantage in going through there. I learn here that there was a party left here two months since and went through that route. They have wrote back and say they found it a very pleasant country to travel through and were treated with all civility by the Mexicans. I have come across a Mr. Monahan who settled on Indian River. He tells me his son went with the party from here. He wrote him from the City of Mexico stating that they had no difficulty whatever in getting through that way. There is thirty seven passengers here now come back on the **Falcon** because they couldn't get a way from

Panama. I suppose brother Daniel [Webster Ferguson] is at Panama now. The Steamers **California** and **Panama** that left Panama on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January have neither of them returned to Panama yet. It is supposed the crews have left them in San Francisco and they can't get men to work them back. The latest news from the mines is that they have the fountain head of the gold and get it in larger quantities than ever. I mean to get there and have my share of it, the exact quantity I haven't yet determined on. I find a good many acquaintances here and get along very well. It has been Easter Holidays. Ever since I have been here processions with Christ on a litter, with Bands of Music, then He rises from the Dead, the bells all ring, cannons firing, music playing and rare sights I assure you. I have been all through their Churches. They are splendid. The buildings here look old and ancient though some of them are splendid. There is a great deal of wealth here. The people are very fond of show and dress. They dress their children very elegant, they look like little gentlemen and ladies. I should like to buy some dresses I saw here for our children if I had money to spare but when I come from California I will come this way and bring them if fortune favors me. I think of leaving here on the fifteenth in packet line that trades between here and Vera Cruz. It is a four or five day passage. I shall take stage from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico. When I get there I shall learn which is the best point on the Pacific to go to: whether Mazatlan, San Blas or Acapulco. There is communication between all of these places and the City of Mexico every week. I shall then write you by which route I go and all the particulars of the

(Continued on page 4)

(Ferguson from page 3)

journey. I shall get there before any of them that left Key West now except Stitcher and Martinela and I may meet them in Vera Cruz. I am stopping here with Mr. Hart who I got acquainted with in Key West. George Keries' little daughter is here in the same house with me. This leaves me well and in fine spirits. Take good care of yourself and the children. Kiss them all for me. I would like to have the chance to do it myself but I can't at present. My duty to them calls me hence and I will obey and look forward to the future. Don't give yourself any uneasiness for me. Take care of yourself and the little ones. I will take good care of myself I assure you. Ask Mrs. Shanihan to let you know when Shanihan is coming over to Havana. If he comes before the fifteenth of April write me by him.

This, from your ever affectionate husband.

\*\*\*\*\*

Havana April the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1849

Dear Wife,

I write you once more from this place though I expected to leave here before this but receiving information from Vera Cruz not very favorable of the route through Mexico, I have altered my mind again and shall go by the way of Panama. I have got late news from there which satisfies me if I can't get passage from there immediately I can go to work there and make money for a while at least. I expect I shall find my brother Daniel there at Panama if he has not got passage away which is doubtful. The steamer **Falcon** will be here on the 25<sup>th</sup> going to Chagres. There is a young man going from here with me. He says he shall take with him a thousand dollars and if I should

get out of money before we get there he will supply me with what I want. He is a gentleman and I am happy to say a countryman of yours and he expresses very warm hearted friendship towards me particularly since I told him my wife was a countrywoman of his. He says he is going to stick to me and return with me so if he proves a friend indeed you may have chance to thank him for whatever he may do for me. I am sorry I didn't write you in my last letter to write me by the **Isabel** when she returns this time but then I didn't expect to stay here til now. Still I looked for a letter, went aboard of the steamer and to the office in hopes you might possibly think I might not get away but I was disappointed. I wrote you by Capt. Potter a young man who went to Key West in the **Isabel** on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April. I hope you got it. Write to me at Panama, direct your letter to Panama, New Grenada, by the way of Charleston. If you write by the steamer going to Charleston on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May it will come back here on the 18<sup>th</sup>, leave here on the **Falcon** on the 25<sup>th</sup> for Charges, I shall get it on the 25<sup>th</sup>. I will write you from Panama on the return of the **Falcon** this write which you will get on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May from Charleston by the mail. Write me whether you heard anything more from Albert before he left Charleston. I have been here now 17 days. The time seems long. If I had thought I should have not got away before this time, would have went home in the steamer and stayed til this trip. I regret I didn't very much. I assure you my greatest uneasiness is your health. If I can only hear you are well and our children, too, I shall be perfectly content being fully satisfied of your prudence and capability to manage all our affairs. I haven't the slightest uneasiness on that score. You may think I am

flattering you, as I never told you so before, but you know the old adage Praise to the face is open disgrace, but I satisfy you of my sincerity by confessing that I wish I had given you as little reasons to doubt my Prudence, Virtue and Integrity as you have me to doubt yours. I should be better satisfied with myself but I will try for the future to make atonements to you for the past. Then I know you will forgive me for any little flirtations I may have been guilty of. Live in hopes Rosalinda, there is better days yet in store for us with the help of God we will yet live to enjoy it. Take good care of yourself then I know you will take good care of, may God Bless you and them, too, and take you and them in His especial care til my return is the first heartfelt praise I ever made in my life. I regret I had to leave you with such scant means but I have this consolation to think that your prudence and management is equal to the emergency. Get along the best you can and don't trouble yourself about me. I am as a buck. My jaws got well in a few days after I got here. I am getting so fleshy I can hardly wear my dress coat without under shirts. In short, I never enjoyed better health in my life. Enclosed is a piece of wire cloth for George with directions where to get it. Give it him when next you see him. Give my best respect to Mrs. Harris, all enquiring friends. Kiss all the children for me, Cecilia twice, and except for yourself,

The love and best wishes of your ever affectionate husband.

Thomas J. Ferguson

\*\*\*\*\*

Panama May the 11<sup>th</sup>, 1849

Dear Wife,

(Continued on page 6)

MONROE COUNTY  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Key, Fla June the 19<sup>th</sup> 1850  
My Dear husband  
your letter came duly to hand on the 17<sup>th</sup>  
just it gave me much joy to hear you ar well  
and your prospects good I assure you it is  
no fault on my part not receiving letters  
I have written every mail with exception of  
two mails since I got your first letter from  
Sanfrancesco your brother George written often  
not receiving but letters from you and none  
from danial the babys ar on the mend thank  
god Thomas raises but little blood now as  
the coff is delaiting his appetite is increasing  
exceley walks round in the day time her  
fever is high at night I think with care the  
will get better that the shall fame I assure you  
was it to cost me ~~at~~ every thing I have wael  
is a fine strong child and g has got over the  
hooping coff easy she has good times and  
enjoys herself well my health is good my  
cheeks begins to obtain that Irish blush  
th once had I am ready to travel to any part  
of the world where you think the climate  
will suit the children it shall be my home  
with the greatst of pleasure Thomas is a bright boy  
I shouldnt like to deprive hem of any advantages  
will afford him he is a fenus every bit of him

Rosalinda's letter of June the 19th, 1850. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

(Ferguson from page 4)

I arrived here day before yesterday and shall leave day after tomorrow morning on the ship **Mormon** in company with my brother Daniel [Ferguson], Stafford and Saywood and the rest of the Key West party who I have found here all well, all excitement to get away to the Land of Promise. Daniel tells me he had a talk with fifteen young men who arrived here a few days ago on the steamer **Oregon** from California on their way home. They said they had got as much gold as they wanted and were going home to enjoy it. They had seven bushels of pure gold with them that they had dug themselves in the space of six months. Daniel says they told him to keep cool, that there was enough gold there for all, and that any reasonable man that would work and be prudent could get enough in six or twelve months to satisfy him. Some of the passengers that came on the **Oregon** had a piece of gold weighing 8 lbs. The steamer **Panama** is also here and the **California** is expected daily, besides there is some six or eight ships here filling with passengers. I have got my passage in a first rate new ship by Daniel's having a passage engaged for his brother-in-law who hasn't got here yet. Our prospect is good, gold a plenty ahead which I intend to have my share of and return soon to enjoy it with you and our little ones. May God protect you til I return. Write me on receipt of this. Direct your letter, write two, one to Sutters Fort and one to San Francisco, California, then I shall be sure to get one of them. Put them in the mail going to Charleston, they will then be exchanged in Charleston to the California mail. I will write you as soon as I arrive in San Francisco. I have much to tell you about the country and natives

here but I haven't time now. Keep good courage. I will soon be home to tell you all. Kiss all the children for me. Tell Cecelia I will bring her two pounds of gold to make bracelets and rings all for her for being father's beauty. Tell Mrs. Stafford that her old man is well and going in the same ship with me. This leaves me well. I have eat the natives out of house and home since I came ashore. This from your ever affectionate husband.

Thomas J. Ferguson

P.S. I wrote you twice from Havana and once from Chagres before I left the vessel. This place is full of people, every hole and corner, but a good many about to leave. Great excitement who shall get away first. Get that paper from Mr. Corkren [Corcoran] and send it to the Clerk's office and have it recorded. Don't neglect it. Tell Mr. Corkren I will bring him a lump of gold for his trouble when I return. Keep all straight and take care of yourself.

\*\*\*\*\*

Key West July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1849

Dear Husband,

Your much esteemed letter duly came to hand and I am glad to hear you are enjoying good health, and have a fine prospect of doing well, and returning soon. The children and myself have been sick for the last five weeks and I have been compelled to get a white woman to take care of us. She proves to be very kind and attentive. I am not able as yet to do anything. The doctor thinks if I am prudent I will soon recover my health. We do not know what my disease is, but may be able to tell you in my next. Cecilia for three weeks could not walk at all, caused entirely from weakness, but she is recovering and has been able

to walk for the last week. I hope the Lord will be merciful and spare us all until your return. I am going as straight as possible but our sickness was a great expense but the children has not suffered for anything. Everything that was necessary was got for them. I have not got in debt so far but I cannot say for the time to come what I may do. Times are pretty dull here, at present we have not had many wrecks for the last three months. Mr. Wall has a large warehouse built on Simonton's lot. Mr. Mags had the management of the building. Your brother George has sold three thousand dollars worth of arrowroot. He has not been on the Key for the last seven weeks. It is my intention to have the children christened this afternoon. Old Mrs. Mallory and Mr. Steven Mallory are to be sponsors for Thomas, Mr. and Mrs. Wall for Cecilia, Mrs. Steven Mallory and Mr. Manaham for Isabella. Mr. Manaham and family are residing here and requested me to ask you if you delivered the letter to his son. Mrs. Walker requests you as a favor to take care of her son if he should be sick and when you write to mention. I am very happy to hear you have met with your brother Daniel and hope you will meet with Albert also. Dig fast and look for that large piece of gold for Cecilia. She talks of you daily. I cannot answer the questions which Thomas puts in regard of you. Isabella grows rapidly and has two teeth and they all join with me in sending you a kiss. Mr. Cochron [Corcoran] wishes to know how large a piece you will be able to send him. Mrs. Stafford's family is well. This is the fourth letter which I have written, one to Havana, one Panama, one to Sutter's Fort and the other to San Francisco.

Your affectionate wife,

Rosalind Ferguson

\*\*\*\*\*

San Francisco July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1849

Dear Wife,

I arrived here on the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month having sixty three days passage from Panama, rather a tedious passage but well and hearty, the weather at sea was calm and sea very smooth. On my arrival here my brother Daniel and I took a small job which we done in a week for which we got five hundred dollars. Since then we have built us a boat to go up to the mines and intend to leave tomorrow. I was offered sixteen dollars a day the day I got here and refuse good jobs now to go up to the mines so you may judge what I think of the prospect. The gold stories we heard about California before I left home was no humbug. I have seen lots of the gold here, one lump weighing fourteen and half pounds. I don't know as I shall find any of those big lumps but I am bound to have gold of some sort, there is plenty of it here and no mistake. This place is very healthy though very cold. I have worn flannel shirt and drawer with my thick buckskin pantaloons ever since I have been here and then been cold with a severe wind from the sea like our Northers in Key West but back from the coast it is warm. I have eat apples, pears and blackberries here. Some things here sell high, others very low. Clothing is cheaper than it is in the States, flour \$10, pork \$25, beef \$5 of the best salt, fresh beef from 12 to 18 cents a lb., potatoes \$10 for a hundred lbs., onions seventy five cents a pound, cheese fifty, saleratus \$2.50, butter \$1.50, cheese fifty cents. This town is overrun with goods, the streets and yards full, lying about open, nobody steals. There ain't a quarter stores enough to hold them. They are building



*Sacramento City during the flood of January 1850. Photo credit: Drawn by Geo. W. Casilear & Henry Bainbridge from the Library of Congress.*

very rapidly mostly temporary frames covered with canvas for the want of lumber. Lumber is worth from three to five hundred dollars a thousand and shingles forty dollars. I paid for lumber to build us a skiff boat, four feet wide and twenty-four feet long, one hundred dollars. I have made money enough since I have been here to pay my share of the boat, tent, cooking utensils, mining tools and a plenty of all sorts of provisions of the best to last us four months besides I have paid a hundred and fifty dollars that I had to borrow to bring me here besides building our boat and laying idle two days after we landed. If I have my health here for the next six months I think I will have considerable of a pile of the dust and perhaps some lumps. The next time I write you from this place I shall send you a draft on New York which you can get cashed in Key West. I don't expect to be down here again under three or four months. I may sooner I shall write you from the mines if I have a chance to send them down here to mail them. I am very anxious to hear from you. I assure you I expected to get a letter by the last mail which got here the day I did. The next mail will get here the fifteenth of next month. I shall leave directions to have my letters

forwarded to me. You direct your letters here. Write me often. I am afraid you will want for money before I can send you some, if you do, sell anything you have got. Don't want for anything. I will send you plenty soon. Take good care of yourself and the children and don't trouble yourself about me. I will look out for Number One I assure you. Mr. Stafford, Saywood and Frank Clark have gone up to the mines. Mr. Wolf and Galop haven't arrived yet though they started first from Panama. I am looking for Al here now soon. I wish he was here to go up with me and Daniel. Tell George I wish he was here. I think he could dig here to a better advantage than digging coontie roots. The next time I write you I shall be able to tell you more about the digging. Jim Hall is here. He tells me Mr. Haley is up the river, has a store there, and William Patterson is with him. I write this in a hurry as we are getting ready to leave tomorrow morning. This leaves me as well as ever. I was with a tremendous appetite ever since I left the vessel. I see plenty of chances here to make money which I intend to improve. As soon as I get a plenty I shall be with you again to enjoy it, till then

(Continued on page 8)

(Ferguson from page 7)

get along the best you can. Kiss the children all for me, tell them that lump of gold is forth coming to make the rings and bracelets. No more present. This from your ever affectionate husband.

Thomas J. Ferguson

\*\*\*\*\*

Key West Oct 8<sup>th</sup>, 1849

Dear Husband,

It affords me much pleasure to hear from you and particularly to hear that you are pleased and in good health and that there is prospect of making money. I am astonished you have not received any of my letters. I have directed them according to orders but now that you are settled down at the mines have no doubt but that you will receive my letters regularly. I sincerely wish so, at all events, you must certainly be desirous to hear from us. I have made some repairs on the house which it needs and am at present more comfortable than we formerly were. When you send the draft I would prefer your directing it to Mr. Wall than to any other person. Mrs. Walker has moved into her new house and I find her a very kind neighbor and she requests you, when her son lands in California, to be kind to him also and to write to her often. She feels unhappy about him. The Indians have broke out again in Florida and your brother George was compel to return to Key West but has returned back again to the Miami. It is two weeks since he has been gone. No harm has been as yet at that place but as they have commenced general hostilities we look for him every day. Mrs. Stafford's family is well and all the Key West friend

or rather friends to those who have gone to California. Do not think your little babies forget you, they talk of you every day. Cecilia is always Pa's baby. Thomas is a man and can go to Stanfield's and all the neighboring stores. Isabella creeps and has eight teeth. She is a strong and hearty child. Thomas goes to California to you every day he says he wishes to dig doubloons. I hope when you receive this Albert will be with you and enjoying good health. Write me very often. I can get along here by industry when I am well. Your brother George was desirous to hear from you and had some idea of going to California but his family is not pleased at his going so far away. Your Mother sends me word that she hopes soon to see me and my babies now walk. She says that she hears Tom is beautiful. Give my love to brother Daniel. The last account we had from Danbury about two weeks since his family and self were well. I wish to get the house all finished. Trade is very dull here. A great many here is anxious to be with you in California but they lack the means. Take care of yourself. I never was as anxious to live in the world as I am now and to take care of the babies. Dig fast and come back soon, never mind how big the lumps are. The babies join with me in sending you a kiss.

I remain your affectionate wife,

Rosalinda

\*\*\*\*\*

Uba River Calif. Oct 21<sup>st</sup> 1849

Dear Wife,

I now improve this opportunity to write you by one of our neighbors who leaves here for San Francisco tomorrow, also to get our letters. I haven't received a line from you since I left home. I have wrote you

four times, twice from Havana, once from Panama and one from San Francisco. I expect to get some letters from you by this mail's return from San Francisco which will be in about two weeks. I am getting very anxious to hear from you I assure you. I suppose you are somewhat so to hear from me as it is now nearly three months since I wrote. I was then about starting to the mines on the success of which depended my trip to California. I will now give you a statement of my success. After arriving here I spent a month in hunting, or prospecting as they call it here, up and down the river for a good place to locate. I at length found one which proves to be good on which my brother Daniel and myself have built two machines for washing out gold and a water wheel to lift up water for them and rock them and also work a pump to keep the water out of the holes we dig which works them all effectually so much so that we have made over five thousand dollars in the last three weeks. Day before yesterday Daniel and I alone took about a thousand dollars, the day before that five hundred and the before that three hundred but yesterday not more than a hundred. As we were digging off the surface of the ground when we get down four or five feet we find it very rich. I have scraped up two ounces of gold in my two hands full of dirt but the digging is not all as rich as this. By a great odd we have got the richest spot I have ever seen on the river. It is a small bar on the side of the river in the form of a triangle about fifty yards on each side with rocks ten feet high on two sides and the river on the other. We have the whole of it to ourselves and nobody troubles us. We can't dig half of it this season before the river will rise so we can't work which will be in January or February. If we have our

health till then which is first rate now, we will have a pretty good pile of gold. I think it would do your eyes good to look at it. Perhaps I will then come home and back in spring but I am bound to have all the gold out of this bar before I leave it for good. I think there is a much in it as Daniel and I will both want and we are well fixed now to get it out better than anybody I see about these diggings. I should send you some money. I know you must want some but I should have to go to San Francisco to buy a draft which would take me two weeks in which time I am pretty sure to make from two to five thousand dollars. As we are now situated my time is everything. We have only a got a certain time to work before the river rises and will drive us off. I shall improve the first opportunity to send you money I assure you. I have got now twenty five hundred dollars and more forth coming every day. Get along the best you can. Sell anything you have got if you want money to live on. Don't pinch yourself or the children. I will send you plenty the first opportunity. If I have my health for the next twelve months I think I shall have enough that we can live above want for the rest of our lives and leave some for the children. Tell Cecelia I have got the two pounds of gold for her bracelets and some two hundred rubies to set in them which I have found amongst the gold. I save them all. They are valuable. I will have you a ring made with gold on my digging and set with them if you're patient and behave yourself pretty well til I get back. Don't fret and trouble yourself about me. I am fairing very well here. We have got plenty of pork, dried beef, ham, flour, hard bread, beans, cornmeal, coffee, sugar, molasses, dried peaches and cherries. We get fresh beef every few days so we fair

pretty well. I made some molasses cake this morning which went very well. It wasn't quite as good as you used to make but it done very well. Albert is not here yet. We are looking for him every day. I have wrote letters directing him where to find us. You mustn't think that our success here is a fair sample of all that have come to California. I know of many that will return worse off than they left home. There are a good many to work about us here that ain't making much more than their expenses. Many get sick and return. Write me often. Direct your letters Sacramento City, California. I can get them there sooner than at San Francisco. All I can say more is do the best you can. Take care of yourself and the children and I will the same til I return. This from your husband. I will send you a sample of gold stitching to this wafer.

Thomas J. Ferguson

\*\*\*\*\*

Key West Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup> 1849

My Dear Husband,

I received your letter on the 13<sup>th</sup> and it [gave] me a great deal of satisfaction to know that you were well and also your brother Daniel and that you were so fortunate in finding a place as it with no doubt enable soon to return. I received five letters from you and sent eight in answer, two to Sutters Fort, two to Havana, and four to San Francisco. You wrote to me to sell all that I could. I would like to know what did you leave for me to dispose of that was of any value. As you have charged me to behave myself I will give you an account of what we have been doing since your departure. I was two months sick and was therefore obliged to hire someone to wait upon me.

The children were sick off and on during the whole summer the weather having been the warmest that we ever experienced on Key West, however, since cold weather has set in they have been enjoying pretty good health. I have taken in both ironing and washing since I have recovered up to this time and find that I am no longer able to do it. I have chills and fevers every other and the Dr. says that it is from too much exercise. I am debilitated. He advises me to go north in the summer. I have spent sixty odd dollars on the house. I had the room lathed and the door put on, shutters on the house and also had it painted. Sophia Fish and Diana moved from the house and also took a month's rent with them. I assure you it was a great loss to me. George and Phoebe remain in the house yet. Provisions have been very high here, flour was \$12 a barrel and very little was to be got even at that price. There is plenty now but no money. It troubles me to hear the auction bell ring. I have no one to go for me and no money to spend. You know what Key West is when you have to buy everything at retail. Your brother George still makes arrowroot. We look for him every day. The Indians are yet hostile. Cecelia returns sincere thanks for the rubies that you have found for her but she says she would like to see them. Tommy says he does not want any, he can earn them for himself. Isabel is a handsome girl. You can dig them for Cecelia, she will need them all. Isabel can walk alone and is a large strong baby and I assure you very troublesome. She could call your name when but seven months old. I often wish that you were with me to see and hear the little ones. Old Mrs. Mallory has been the best friend that I have

(Continued on page 10)

(Ferguson from page 9)

met with since you are gone. Write as soon as possible and if you can I would like you to pay the letters as they charge exceedingly high for postage here. When your letter arrived I was sick in bed and had no money to release it. When you send I prefer Mr. Wall. The babies join with me in sending their love to you.

I remain your affectionate wife,

R. Ferguson

\*\*\*\*\*

San Francisco Jan 14<sup>th</sup>, 1850

Dear Wife,

I this day received from you the first and only letter since I left home which I assure you gave me much pleasure to hear you were well and doing well and the little ones able, alive and kicking. I arrived here yesterday and found Albert very sick in a tent laying on the ground. I was lucky in finding him in a half hour after I arrived. I this morning hired him a good comfortable room and a woman to nurse him, bought him a good bed and bedding so that he is now very comfortable, and I think I can see he is better since morning. I shall stay with him til he is better and then take him up the River with me. We have good employment for him and can afford to pay him well. We have one store already established and shall start on another soon. We have a young man hired for a year for a clerk in one store, a very trusty young man, a priest Benedictus, son of Ridgebury. I used to know his father. I didn't think of coming here when I left home, I intended only to come to Sacramento City that is near Sutters Fort to buy some goods we were very much in want of and go back by the next

steamer which would have been tomorrow. I found Sacramento City over flowing with water from two to eight feet deep so that I couldn't get what I wanted there so I took the steamer yesterday and come here. It was a very lucky thing on Albert's account: it so happened though he had very kind attention from John Roberts and a young doctor who came out passenger with him. They done all they could for him under circumstances. They were living in a tent and sleeping on the ground which was very bad for Albert. I found his bed very damp under him. The weather had been rainy and they had no chance to dry it. I think it ten chances to one if he would have ever recovered if I hadn't removed him and now he must have kind attention and nursing which he will now have. The woman in whose house I have him is an Englishwoman. She is very kind and attentive to him. I told her not to let him want for any comfort money would buy him and I shall stay with him and sleep in the room so I can see to him myself til he is out of danger though my business is very urgent for me to return. I herewith send you a draft on New York payable to Mr. Wall for a hundred dollars. You take it to him and he will give you the money for it. He may charge you a small percent for doing so, which you will pay him. I should send you more but we have the most of our money invested in goods and I came down to buy a few more which we want and haven't with me but about two thousand dollars which I shall want to invest. Make this answer you for the present. I will send you more soon. Daniel and I have been very lucky since we arrived here in everything we have undertaken. Our trading has proved very successful and profitable thus far and our prospects is first rate. We are both well and very hearty. I must close

my letter as the mail closes now in a few minutes. Take care of yourself and the babies and write me often. Your ever affectionate husband.

Thomas J. Ferguson

P.S. Direct your letters to Sacramento City. It is dark now.

\*\*\*\*\*

San Francisco Feb 28<sup>th</sup>, 1850

Dear Wife,

I arrived here last night from the Yuba River and this morning got from the post office the second letter I have received from you, dated the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, which informs me you were then sick and also the children and that Mr. and Mrs. Manahan were living with you which I am very glad to hear. Tell them I have not seen their son. I put their letter in the post office for him. I just parted with Mr. Fogarty, Jimmy Ogden and Mr. Roberts's son. They have started up the river. Mr. Fogarty gave me a precious gift which I soon recognized with the exception of the flaxen lock which I suppose must be Isabel's. I thank you much for them: they are precious remembrances. They speak to me louder than words reminding of the necessity of energetic exertions to provide for them amply while I have a chance, which I assure you I am improving to the best of my ability. If I have my health as I have now for the next twelve months I think I can then sit down and rest. I am here now buying goods to take to the mines. Since I was here and wrote you last, Daniel has been down and taken up \$3000 worth of goods. Immediately on his return I came down again. We are selling a great many goods as soon as I return now we shall start another store at Eliza Town on the Feather River at

the head of Steamboat Navigation. We purchased a lot there a few days since for which we paid six hundred dollars. We have been offered six hundred for one half of it. We also have another lot in the town given to us by the Proprietor of the town in consideration of our being the first who landed goods there from a steamboat. I am truly grateful to God for the kind Providence that has smiled upon me in all my transactions in this country. We are well situated and making money. We have our own teams to haul our goods, eight mules and six horses, which we bought last winter when they were cheap. Now they are worth from two to three hundred dollars a piece. I have one very fine saddle horse which I keep for myself to ride. I don't wear myself out footing it nowadays when I have plenty of good horses to ride. I saw Quimby Adams, [illegible] Bake, and Samuel Tift at Sacramento City yesterday, and Mr. Coldwell I met at our store about ten days ago. He stayed all night with me. He told me he was short of money when he got up to where he wanted to go. He gave the teamster that hauled his things up an order on me for a hundred dollars which I paid for him. Today Mr. Fogarty told me he was out of money so I loaned him some to help him up the river. I was in the same situation myself when I landed here, hadn't but five dollars in the world, but thank God I now have it in my power to help my Key West friends when they stand in need. I herewith send you a copy of the Draft I sent you in my last letter which if you haven't received you can get the money for this. If you got the money for the first you can destroy this. It is now dark and mail closes for this Steamer tonight so I must close my letter. Take care of yourself and the children. God Bless you all and

shall do the same. Write me often.

From your affectionate husband,

Thomas Ferguson

P.S. the copy of the Draft I haven't yet got with me now. I left it at home in my trunk. I will send it to you in my next if I don't get your answer before.

\*\*\*\*\*

San Francisco March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1850

Dear Wife,

I have been looking with great anxiety for three days past for the arrival of a mail steamer that I might get a letter from you before I wrote you by the next mail. I can't wait no longer as I leave here tomorrow for the Yuba again. I have been up and established two more stores since I wrote you last. I have now been here buying a large stock of goods for them. My freight bill on the steamboats up to the Yuba this trip on the goods I have bought will be over twenty five hundred dollars. For all of them I have paid cash and have plenty left to pay my freight bill when I get up the river. I should have sent you some more money by this letter if I had received your letter informing me of the receipt of that I sent you. I herewith send you the Duplicate of the Draft I sent you. If you haven't received the first you can get the money for this, if you received the first this is of no use. Tell Mrs. Fogarty I saw her husband in Sacramento City at work four days ago when I came down, also Robert's son Quimby. They were well. We are doing so much business now it takes me all the time to go up and down the river and buy goods while Daniel takes charge of our mining and trading operations on the Yuba. I only stopped there one day when up last time. Everything goes prosperously. If it

continues til next fall I think I can afford to come home again at least to see you and the babies. If I don't have money enough to be contented to remain you must come out here with me for here is the place for me to make it and I can't bear the idea of living away from you any longer. I hope I shall have enough to satisfy me. My prospect is now good. I sleep one half of the time now with gold enough under my head of my own more than one-half of the aristocracy of Key West and I think I am in a fair way now to have as much as any of them has got. I shall try hard at any rate. If I don't get it, it shan't be my fault. My health was never better. I am ten pounds heavier now than when I left home. I have great pleasure in making money and I look forward to the time with pleasure when we shall enjoy it together. There is a great pleasure in being prosperous of money. It gives a person importance and power that nothing else can acquire for them. I feel the importance of it now. Even in California there is a pleasure in it that I before never thought it was to enjoy. Take good care of yourself and the children for I feel there is much enjoyment laid up in store for us yet. Write me often. Practice, take lessons, learn to write your own letters. Let money be no obstacle to your learning if with that you can acquire it, I think it of much importance. Give my love to all our friends and for yourself and the babies.

The never dying  
love of your husband,

Thomas J. Ferguson

\*\*\*\*\*

Key West April the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1850

My Dear Husband,  
Your letter came safe to hand on  
(Continued page 12)

(Ferguson from page 11)

the fourth instance for it was the first I had in six months. It gave me a great consolation to hear that you were well as it was that day twelve month you left home. You promised me to come home in a year but you say nothing about it in your letter. The family here is quite discouraged about California. Hearing of Albert's death never shall I forget the morning he left Key West. He was full of hope and future prospect for the better. His day was not come. I can imagine how you found him but I am sorry that he had no friend to see to him sooner. Poor Albert's tomb lies in a foreign land amongst strangers. I hope you will take care of all his things and bring them home to his mother for I know she will think a great deal of them. I sent her the letter that gives the account of his death. I did not feel like writing to her as I was not acquainted with her as she never wrote to me. I have never got any account of my people since you left. It is true what Sister Mary said that they never should write me until I went to see them. My Dear Husband, I am one of the most miserable creatures in the world. All the gold in California will not recompence me for the anxiety of mind that I feel. The babies are playing cheerfully at this moment. They do not know the anxiety of mind. Thomas asks me what do I cry for if it is for his Uncle Albert. He is a wise good boy and I assure you he does not forget you. He remembers the clothes that you wore and can tell me about them. Cecelia says that her uncle is dead and put in the grave with Mama Harvey. She died the 5<sup>th</sup> of February and fills a drunkard's grave as I always expected. Isabel is a fine strong child. They all have the whooping cough. I am thankful

they have [no need to] have any person to take care of them. I assure you I do that as far as my means of strength and means will allow me. I carried the check to Mr. Wall. He says he knows nothing about the fellow. He says he will take it and do the best he can with it. There is a great many false checks come here. I hope mine will not be so. I assure you this moment I have no money in the house. If you say come to you I am ready for I am getting tired of this life. Your company is more to me than anything else in this world. Your brother George is yet making arrowroot. He tells me he has made 5 hundred dollars the last three months. Delia declares that he shall go to California with her consent. Your youngest brother has the cold fever pretty bad but my advice is to you to have nothing to do in sending for him for at the end he may be as well at home. I will not get an answer about the check until the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May. Everything looks as natural as when you left it. Take care of yourself for my sake and the babies. My health is pretty good this last 3 months. The babies join with me in sending you a kiss. No more to say at present but remain your affectionate wife.

Rosalind Ferguson

\*\*\*\*\*

San Francisco April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1850

Dear Wife,

I omitted writing you by the last mail hoping I should receive a letter from you by this mail, being disappointed I will write you a few lines to let you know how I am getting along in this world of wonders. I received a letter from George by this mail informing me you were well and the children also at the time he wrote which relieved

my anxiety very much as the last letter I received from you dated the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December informed me that you and the children were all sick which has made [me] very uneasy and anxious to her from you. George's letter is dated the 6<sup>th</sup> instant of January which is the last dates I have from home. I have written you every mail since January and twice to George but received no answer. I sent you a small draft in January which I have waiting to hear if you have received. If you haven't received it I had a mind to send you another by this mail. I have concluded to wait til I hear whether you have got the one I sent or not. I don't know how it is I have got a letter by this mail for Daniel mailed in Danbury the 27<sup>th</sup> February when the last I have from you was mailed the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December. Do write me often every month at least; I will not begrudge the postage though it be \$10 per letter and I shall pay the postage on my letters in future as by your last you informed me when my letter arrived you hadn't money to pay the postage which grieved me very much that I hadn't sent you money sooner, for it wasn't because I hadn't the money but because I wanted to save a little time and a few paltry dollars expense in coming to San Francisco to obtain a draft; but I am only sorry I did so is all I can say now and hope you will never be thus situated again. I will now give you some account of what I am doing since I last wrote you. I have been here three or four times buying at each time from three to five thousand dollars worth of goods and taken them to the mines. Daniel and I have now three stores and some men mining, also we have shares in two damming operations for turning the river, one of them turns the river right by where we were mining last season where we know the bed of the river to be rich.

Daniel is a director in one company and superintendent in the other. I haven't been there much lately. We have also a large store at the point from which we shall be sure to make money as we shall have the control of the trade of both companies. I have been speculating some in real estate lately, in which I have been very lucky. I have invested in the town of Elisa sixteen hundred dollars, in Lindd City one thousand dollars, in Fredonia, one thousand dollars, and in a steamboat two thousand, out of which as the prospect is now, I will realize a handsome sum. I won't say how much as that is yet to be determined. You may think I have invested money in wild speculations but I have watched things pretty closely here and I'm considered by business men here as a pretty sharp speculator. My opinion is sought after by the best of them. I associate with the first men here and more in a different sphere of life from what I ever did before and I don't feel that depression and embarrassment I used to in the society of influential and monied men. I feel and am considered now their equal which is no little satisfaction. It is worth coming to California for. I will send you a newspaper in which you will see some mention of the towns I own an interest in. This is a strange country. Things change here as by magic. Towns and cities grow into existence here as by magic. It requires a pretty energetic mind to keep pace with them. I intend to keep mine in active operation til I make a fortune at least and if fortune favors me as she has done thus far since I have been in California, I think I shall obtain my more sanguine wishes. I am beginning to like this country quite well. You needn't think strange if I should be home this fall for you and Daniel's wife and bring you out to this country. I think now the prospect

is there will be everything and everybody here in a year or so and all the luxuries in the world will be here for they are now fast coming and there is the money here to pay for them. Before I come after you I shall build me a fine house at Elisa. I think the prettiest place you ever saw at this season of the year a perfect bed of flowers for miles surrounding the town. It beats anything I ever saw. This leaves myself and Daniel well and in good spirits. Keep yours up and take care of your health by all means. The children I know you will take care of before yourself. Write me often. Give my respects to all friends and except for yourself my best love. Kiss all the children for me. God bless you all. This from your ever affectionate husband.

Thomas J. Ferguson.

Please tell Mrs. Fogarty I saw her husband yesterday. He was well but I am afraid he is not doing very well.

\*\*\*\*\*

Key West May the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1850

My Dear Husband,

Your letter came duly to hand on the 4<sup>th</sup> instant. It gave me no small joy to hear you are well, for health is one of the greatest blessings. For my part, at present God has visited my family with a great deal of sickness, this moment we are all sick with fever and whooping cough and has had it for this last three months. Thomas had it but slight to now but last night and tonight his fever is high. Cecelia and Isabel is much better. For this 2 last days their cough is much easier. I have had good health myself for this last 4 months. If I don't get wore out now for I am up night and day and has got no help. I

have never known this complaint so bad in any part of the world I have been in. There is so many sudden deaths on the Key. Mrs. Nap had a fine baby, it was quite well in the morning and was a corpse at six o'clock that evening. I have been with Mr. Wall today. He said that he had not received answer from the firm as yet but he made no doubt that it was perfectly good. He offered me money or anything in his store that I wanted. I don't know but what I will be obliged to accept of his offer as I have not received no rent for this three months from George Clark so you may judge my circumstances. Your brother George and family is quite well and the compty is making Adely quite stiff. When I told her you sent me one hundred dollars to buy a new dress, she raced forthwith to George to the Miami and he sent her word to spend the face of a hundred dollars in [illegible] and [illegible] and dress herself. I am surprised that you say nothing about coming home. You said that you would come home in a year. The time is up now and it has been a long and tiresome one to me as I am here alone and has to fight my own battles. I am glad to hear that you have not to work hard for I have to work enough to make it up. I am going to have the east room hard wall finished as soon as possible, I have got the materials purchased. Father, I am afraid that my dress will come short when I put a new one on the house. You say that you have got plenty of money. I wish that you would send me a little more of it, if you will. I never had it in my power to pay for the Lot since you went away. I often wished that I had gone with you to California. By all accounts I would make out better than I can here. If you think that the place will suit me

(Continued on page 14)

(Ferguson from page 13)

and the children I am willing to go any place under the globe to you. I've become acquainted with a fine young Irish woman. She is willing to work and would be glad of the offer to go with me to California. Mr. Manning never lived in the house with me. Their son, Anthony, lives here with them. He never got the length of the gold diggings. Thomas says that he writes every day to you and you never send him a letter. He is a bright and intelligent child. He has got a natural gift from God. He is a regular genius and philosopher. I hope it will be in our power to do a parent's duty to him. It would do your heart good to hear the babies talk when they are well. Thomas plays with no boys. He says he is a man and he is beloved by everyone that knows him. Mrs. Mallory is a good old friend. Mr. Fogarty's family is getting along slowly. They have faced the winter with the whooping cough. Key West is growing fast. I surely will be in the center of the city. I have lifted my pen once more in my life and had I but [a] little practice I would be a tolerable good writer but it is never too late to do good. Write to me often. I am surprised that you have not got my letters. I have sent 7 letters and three packages of newspapers to Sacramento City. When you write let me know something about the country. I would like much to see you on that portly steed you speak about and to see your lot of ground. The last account I heard from your mother they were all well at home. Luck's natural. As ever the babies send you.... No more at present but remains your affectionate wife. Rosalindy Ferguson.

\*\*\*\*\*

San Francisco May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1850

Dear Wife,

I, this day, received your letter dated April the 8<sup>th</sup> by which I am happy to learn you are well though the children have the whooping cough which I hope they will get over without any difficulty. You also inform me of the receipt of the draft I sent you in January which I have been waiting very anxious to hear from. It has been so long I was afraid you would never receive it. It is rather singular Mr. Wall didn't know the firm on which the draft was drawn. It was Drew Robinson & Co., one of the first mercantile houses in New York, and drawn by Wells & Co., one of the first bankers in San Francisco. So sure am I of its being punctually paid I shall buy and send you another by this letter drawn on the same house. If Mr. Wall gets the money for the other he will have no hesitation in cashing this for you when you present it to him. I would send you a larger amount but the liability of letters miscarrying is very great. I will send you in small sums and send them oftener. I was sorry to learn from your letter that you were still fretting yourself with that uneasy distrustful anxiety of mind which I was in hopes you had left it off before this time for it only serves to make you sad and melancholy. When it is our duty to make ourselves and others as happy as possible. For my part I have nothing to complain of, everything has turned out full as favorable as I expected when I left home. I have now the money to make us comfortable and if I only I had you and the children with me I should consider myself happy but I hope the separation will now be short. Daniel or myself will, one of us, go home this fall and bring out both of our families. He is getting as anxious to have his here as I be

to have mine. If you can't wait til then sell out stock and [illegible] in Key West and come to me. Don't bring a thing but your clothes and not many of them for I can buy everything here now cheaper than you can bring them here. All the most magnificent silks and satins of China are here in abundance. There has been a very large sale of China goods since I have been here. This time some of the most splendid shawls I ever saw sold here for \$150, they would fetch in New York \$1000s. I was strong tempted to buy some and send to you hadn't the difficulty of getting them to you been so great I should have bought them. I will fetch you some when I come home or send them by Daniel if he comes. I expect we shall have to draw lots which goes home, Daniel or me. If you wish to come before fall let me know that that I may supply you with money. Don't start without less that \$800 to \$1000. It is an expensive route and you must have money to make yourself comfortable. I think you best to wait till fall. It will be a considerable of an undertaking for you to come with the children. Alone I would meet you at the Isthmus but it is impossible for me to leave here now. My time is worth too much. You know the

EDUCATION PROGRAM  
SPONSORS  
\$100 OR MORE  
LINDA & LAWRENCE ABELE  
TOM & KITTY CLEMENTS  
BETTY L. DESBIENS  
BUD DRETTMANN  
JOHN & BEATRICE DUKE  
SHIRLEY FREEMAN & HARVEY SERVER  
CELESTE ERICKSON  
DR. ELIAS GERTH  
MARY HAFENREFFER  
TOM & LYNDA HAMBRIGHT  
HARRIGAN FOUNDATIONS, INC.  
JOHN H. JONES  
LAURA LYNNE KENNEDY  
EDWARD B. KNIGHT  
TOM KNOWLES  
DR. WILLIAM R. PLOSS  
LARRY & GRETCHEN RACHLIN  
JUDITH & JAMES ROBERTS  
SOUTHERNMOST HOTEL IN THE USA  
ED SWIFT

old adage, make hay while the sun shines, but anyhow, make yourself as happy as possible and hope for the future: that is what I do. I never enjoyed better health, am as fat as a bear, weigh a hundred and ninety pounds. Live well, eat plenty of good California beef, the best in the world. If you would do same, eat plenty of Key West beef, turtle and make yourself contented you would get fat too, but never mind I can fat you up when I get you here in California. Take care of yourself and the children. God bless you. From your husband. T. J. Ferguson.

P.S. Fogarty is dead, killed himself drinking, so Robert's son told me. He was with him when he died. Write me every mail or every month. At least the last letter I got before then was dated in February. I want to hear from you often. I shall write you every mail. Tell George I am glad to hear he is doing well. I believe the tide has turned with some of our family at least.

\\*\*\*\*\*

Key West June the 8<sup>th</sup> 1850

My Dear Husband,

Your letter came duly to hand on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May which gave me great consolation to hear you are well and good prospects for future welfare. Your order was good and I thank you much for it – for it could not come in better time. It has kept me from working for others and devote my whole time to the children. They took their sickness in February, Cecelia took it first and when she had it seven weeks she took the chicken pox and the two diseases gave her a trial. This few last days she walks around the room and seems playful. Thomas is very bad yet every time he coughs

he raises blood for the last few weeks. The doctor says it is from his lungs, with the distressing cough he says he may outgrow it, if the cough can be stopped. I am sparing no cost with him. If he is not better in the morning I shall call Doctor O'Hara. He is our new boarding doctor. I am told he is a fine physician. While he has his fever he calls you all the time. I tell him that you are coming home in the fall. He says that is too long. Isabel, she has got quite over it, and is a strong fine child. I hope that God will spare us all to see you once more. My health is good at present. I want it all. I am up night and day. I never knew the want of a husband or mother so much as I do now. This is a cold world. I never had one person to set up with me since the children got sick. With friends I find no confidence, it is every one for themselves. I hope you will be home to eat Christmas dinner with us. Do not come on the sea of Florida in gale months. I cannot help from telling you a little of what we realize in Key West. We had an American vessel land with 640 men. They took a small tow in Cuba. The enemy came so powerful on them they were forced to retreat. The Spanish frigate chased them into the harbor. They were not all ashore when the Spanish General sent for them to be delivered up. All that saved them [was] their vessel drew only 5 feet of water and the frigate nine feet. Their invalid remains here and the rest are gone, we don't know. We have four American cutters in the harbor so we wait for further news. I would send you some newspapers but my whole time is occupied with children. Write me often. Let me know when you are to leave for Key West. May God protect you and send you safe. No more at present but remains affectionate wife.

Rosalinda Ferguson

## BUSINESS MEMBERS

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
GENEALOGY CENTER  
900 LIBRARY PLAZA  
FORT WAYNE, IN 46802 260-421-1223

AMBROSIA TROPICAL LODGING  
618 FLEMING STREET  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 305-294-518

CHESAPEAKE APPLIED TECHNOLOGY  
623 SIMONTON STREET  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 888-873-3381

COASTAL SAILING ADVENTURE, INC.  
28555 JOLLY ROGER DRIVE  
LITTLE TORCH KEY, FL 33042-0839 295-8844

CONCH TOUR TRAINS, INC.  
601 DUVAL ST.  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 294-4142

DR. FRED COVAN  
1901 FOGARTY AVE. SUITE 2  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 305-294-7522

DEWOLF AND WOOD  
ANTIQUARIANS ON THE GREEN  
P.O. BOX 425  
ALFRED, MAINE 04002 207-490-5572

FRIENDS OF ISLAMORADA AREA STATE PARKS  
P.O. BOX 236  
ISLAMORADA, FL 33036

DR. ELIAS GERTH  
2505 FLAGLER AVE.  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 305-295-6790

HISTORIC FLORIDA KEYS FOUNDATION  
510 GREENE STREET  
KEY WEST, FL 33040

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION  
SOCIETY OF THE UPPER KEYS, INC.  
P.O. BOX 2200  
KEY LARGO, FL 33037

KEY WEST ENGINE SERVICE, INC.  
P.O. BOX 2521  
KEY WEST, FL 33045

KEY WEST WOOD WORKS  
6810 FRONT STREET STOCK ISLAND  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 296-1811

MEL FISHER MARITIME HERITAGE SOCIETY  
200 GREENE ST.  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 294-2633

OLD TOWN TROLLEY  
6631 MALONEY AVENUE  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 296-6688

PREMIERE RACING, INC.  
67B FRONT STREET  
MARBLEHEAD, MA 01945 781-639-9545

PIGEON KEY FOUNDATION  
P.O. BOX 500130  
MARATHON, FL 33050

A.R. SAVAGE & SONS, INC.  
701 HARBOUR POST DRIVE  
TAMPA, FL 33602 813-247-4550

SEASTORY PRESS  
305 WHITEHEAD STREET #1  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 296-5762  
SHERI@SEASTORYPRESS.COM

SOUTHERNMOST HOTEL IN THE USA  
1319 DUVAL STREET  
KEY WEST, FL 33040 296-6577

ST. LOUIS AUTOMATIC SPRINKLER CO.  
3928 CLAYTON AVE.  
ST. LOUIS, MO 63110 314-533-7710



San Francisco Feb 28<sup>th</sup> 1850

Dear Wife I arrived here last night from the uba river  
and this morning got from the Post office the second letter  
I have received from you Dated the 8<sup>th</sup> of July which informs  
me you were then Sick and also the children, and that  
Mr & Mrs Amason were living with you which I am very

Thomas Ferguson's letter of February 28, 1850 with the letterhead showing the ships abandoned by their crews. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

Key West Maritime Historical Society  
P.O. Box 695  
Key West, FL 33041

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
KEY WEST, FL  
PERMIT NO. 30