

C Bridgford, Jefferson (1822-), Letters, 1850-1851
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INTRODUCTION

Letters of Jefferson Bridgford to his wife in Missouri while on the Oregon Trail and working in California during the gold rush.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Jefferson Bridgford letters were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Anne B. Forrester on October 15, 1992 (SHS Accession No. 2929).

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The youngest of five sons of Richard and Nancy Bridgford, Jefferson Bridgford was born November 9, 1822, in Woodford County, Kentucky. The family settled in Monroe County, Missouri, in 1836, and relocated to Clay County, Missouri, in 1840.

At the age of 22 Jefferson Bridgford started work as a farm laborer and working with livestock in northern Missouri. In 1848 he married Margaret E. Waller; the Bridgfords raised eight children. Enticed by gold in 1850, Bridgford left his family behind and traveled cross country via the Oregon Trail to California. Once there, he quickly abandoned mining and set up in the steadier business of provisioning the gold camps around Sacramento. In the fall of 1851 he set out home to Missouri by ship via Panama.

On his return Bridgford settled with his family on a farm near Paris, Missouri, where he began to raise short-horn cattle. He eventually became one of the leading breeders and dealers in the region, shipping large herds to California and winning numerous prizes. In latter life he developed an interest in saddle horses, winning the first prize as the best gentleman rider at the 1894 Chicago World's Fair.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The experience of an overland journey to California and working in the goldfields of northern California is conveyed in the letters of Jefferson Bridgford to the wife and child he left behind in Paris, Missouri.

In the letters written on the Oregon Trail, beginning in May 1850, Bridgford describes the daily trials of driving wagons and cattle cross country, and reveals some of his own anxiety in leaving his family. The last trail letter is written in mid-summer from South Pass in Wyoming, near where those California-bound swung south onto the California Trail.

Bridgford's letters from California describe his work provisioning the gold camps around Sacramento, and also touch on mining conditions, the economic situation, the state of other Missourians, and his own desire to return home. The last letter was written from Nevada City, California in July 1851. Bridgford left California in the fall of that year.

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