

David B. Hackman Collection, 1850-1896

Call Number: MG-72

1 box 4 folders, 52 items, 484 pages .3 cubic feet

Repository: LancasterHistory (Organization); PV7

Shelving Location: Archives South, Side 2

Scope and Content Note: Collection contains the original and typed copies of correspondence describing life in the gold fields of California in the 1850s, an account of crossing the desert on the way west, and a journal describing the sea voyage home. Also, two newspaper images relevant to the gold rush and Mr. Hackman's obituary. He sent many letters home to his family in which he related the details of his experience, hardships of finding gold, the high prices and lack of provisions, observations of life in mining towns, his health, and asked for news from home. He also wrote letters to his sweetheart, Harriet B. Miller asking her to write him back, and his uncle, regarding family financial information.

Creator: Hackman, David B.

Conditions for Access: Original materials in Folder 1, Insert 1 and Folder 3 may not be used. Patrons may use the transcripts provided within this collection.

Conditions Governing Reproductions: Collection may not be photocopied. Please contact Research Staff or Archives Staff with questions.

Language: English

Biographical and Historical Note:

David Baer Hackman (1827-1896) was the second child of David Heistand Hackman and Susanna Frantz Baer. He was a third cousin, once removed, of Milton Hershey. David left Lancaster in the fall of 1849 with the hope of finding gold in California. In the spring of 1850, he went to Ohio and joined others headed west. They boarded a steamboat in Cincinnati that was bound for St. Louis and then travelled by wagon train to Sacramento City, where they arrived in September 1850. David found enough gold to buy food and supplies, and then had modest success in 1853. In 1854, he decided to return home, this time travelling by steamer and train from San Francisco to New York via Panama.

The adventure of travelling westward and his life in the gold fields of California are described in detail in David's journal and correspondence. He sent many letters home to his family in which he related the details of his experience, hardships, the prices and lack of provisions, observations of life in mining towns, and asked for news from home.

David also wrote to his sweetheart, Harriet B. Miller (1829-1870), the daughter of Adam and Rebecca Miller of Manheim. Although he did not receive any letters from her, they reunited upon his return to Lancaster in 1854 and married soon after. They had one son named Augustus, who became a minister. Harriet passed away in 1870. David later married Ella C. (1851-1907) and they had five children, Frank, Mabel, Harry, Walter, and Edith.

David's obituary shows that he was involved in the grocery, clothing, hat, and shoemaking businesses. In the 1860 Census he is listed as a hatter, and in 1880 as a saloon keeper. He was well-liked and respected in the community. David and Harriet are buried in Manheim Fairview Cemetery.

Source of Acquisition: Gift of Mrs. Edith Corson, 1 August 1980.

Accruals: No further accruals are expected.

Preferred Citation: David B. Hackman Collection (MG-72), Folder #, LancasterHistory, Lancaster, Pa.

Subject Headings:

Hackman, David Baer, 1827-1896. (LHo-LOC n 2008047019)
Letters. (LHo-LOC sh 85076240)
Diaries. (LHo-LOC gf2014026085)
Gold mines and mining. (LHo-LOC sh 85055733)
California. (LHo-LOC n 79041717)
Manheim (Pa.) (LHo-LOC n 83232981)
Lancaster (Pa.) (LHo-LOC n 79106203)

Search Terms:

California
Correspondence
Diaries
Finding aids
Gold miners
Gold mines and mining
Lancaster
Letters
Manheim
Manuscript groups

Processing History: Processed and finding aid prepared by DT, 1999; revised by JK, 2016. Finding aid was created following DACS conventions.

Folder 1 Original letters

Insert 1 Letter to Mother telling her that he is traveling to California to find gold and his current location on the Missouri shore, two thousand miles from home, with seventy-five men, fifty horses, and wagons. He describes the civilized Indians, seeing thousands of emigrants making their way to California on foot and by boat, enjoying himself roaming with his group, still three more months of traveling, and trying to come home in two years. Missouri River. 21 April 1850. (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 2 Letter to brother informing him that he has reached California and is well, but had encountered struggles in the desert, such as horses dying, and running out of food and money. He describes the inflation in California, living with two other men, the lack of rain, and his little luck thus far concerning locating gold. Hangtown, Upper California. 7 November 1850. (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 3 Letter to Harriet Miller imploring his former love to write him back and informing her of his difficult 112 day journey to California, which he reached on 25 August. He tells her he will not be leaving until winter the next year, but he has found his footing and is confident in finding gold. Hangtown, Upper California. 8 November 1850. (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 4 Letter to brother advising him not to come to California, detailing more and more difficulty in finding gold and making ends meet. He shows an appreciation for hearing of news back home, mentions he lives 60 miles east of Sacramento City, and compares weather of California to the east coast. He makes an inquiry of his money. Hangtown. 9 March 1851. (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 5 Letter to uncle stating his sadness in not receiving any replies to his letters from family and his growing wealth. He details the splitting of his digging group and formation of the smaller one he entered. He laments the loss of almost \$430 he earned, which was stolen from his tent, but refuses to be discouraged. He describes the cost of food. California. 5 March 1852. (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 6 Letter to brother recounting his continuation of searching for gold, having moderate success, and describing a fire in Sacramento City that burned down 32 buildings. He also describes the raised prices due to the fire, but saves money with his partner. He has noticed the little good luck he has had, and the big bad luck, but accepts it and continues to search for gold. He asks about his mother and other family. Columbia, California. 27 November 1852. (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 7 Letter to brother describing the ways he has adjusted to life in California, but continues to advise his brother to stay in Pennsylvania. He realizes he has been away for 2 years and 5 months, but says he will not return for at least another year, until he has something to show for him leaving home. Columbia Tuolumne County California 6 February 1853 (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 8 Letter to his love proclaiming his love for her. He tells her that he is well and mentions gathering the strength to write her again, after the first two letters were lost in the mail. He claims he will never forget her, speaks of the qualities she has that he loves about her, and asks her to write back. Columbia Tuolumne Co. California 5 April 1853 (1 item, 2 pages)

Insert 9 Letter to brother relaying the recent luck he had while digging and sifting, nearly \$1400 in the last 6 weeks and is proud of it. He mentions the gold is now being



searched for deeper into land, as deep as 100 feet. He wants to send money home to the family. Yankee Hill California 28 May 1853 (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 10 Letter to brother telling him to make up his mind to come or not come to California, which he still advises him not to come. He mentions he lives about 160 miles from San Francisco and his salary is \$50 to \$100 a week. He is having second thoughts about sending money home and is looking forward to the 4th of July. Yankee Hill 3 July 1853 (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 11 Letter to brother mourning the loss of a friend, speaking of the little amount of death he has encountered since coming to California. He also mentions that his love life is boring and he's considering coming home in the fall, as his partners are, but decided to make that decision for sure later in the year. California Tuolumne Co. Yankee Hill 27 July 1853 9 (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 12 Letter to brother speaking him deciding to send home money. He mentions he has \$600 but isn't going to send it yet, but maybe will decide to mail it later in the season. He describes how the rainy season hasn't started yet and that's unusual. He makes a remark on a large fire in Sonora from the week before and made up his mind to come home. Sunday 9 October 1853 (1 item, 2 pages)

Insert 13 Letter to brother waiting for his next letter and updating him on the rainy season finally starting, and he is working slowly, but thinks it will lead to success later on if he is patient. He asks for addresses of family members for when he passes through their states on his way home. He travels to Columbia, and sends home \$300. Columbia California 11 December 1853 (1 item, 3 pages)

Insert 14 Letter to brother mentioning how he's waiting for another letter from him, so he can make sure his address is the same and send more money home, another \$300. He describes how the lack of water is making his job a little harder, and names some Christmas gifts he and his partners received from their storekeeper. Columbia Tuolumne Co. California 25 December 1853 (1 item, 2 pages)

Insert 15 Letter to brother hoping he's in better health than he has been with his frequent sicknesses, noting how people are rarely sick in California. He reports his slow money making, then a large sum of \$240, and tells his brother he can do what he wants with the money he sent. Columbia California 20 February 1854 (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 16 Letter to brother stating that he's relieved to know his brother finally got the money, sharing some more about life digging for gold, and giving reasons why his brother would probably not like California if he came to join them. He makes fun of his brother for seeing so many women, and mentions the high prices. Columbia California 25 March 1854 (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 17 Letter to brother telling him that they sell their gold in a small town close to where they dig, mentions he wants to raise over \$1000 to get home, is planning on selling his cattle, and gives details on him seeing the largest piece of gold since he arrived, worth over \$4000. He states he would stay in California if he had family living there. Columbia 7 April 1854 (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 18 Letter to brother stating his anxiety in not receiving mail from him, stated that he's not coming home in the spring because he's having some minor success, and loaned a man a named Cunningham some money after lending David some money the year before. Cunningham deceived him, sold his wagon and his best yoke to other people. Columbia Tuolumne County California 22 April 1854 (1 item, 3 pages)



Insert 19 Letter to brother informing him that he's for sure staying through the summer and mentioning how he's very out of the loop concerning current information about Lancaster. He details when \$500 he sent to them should get there and mentions a storm they had in California a couple days ago and other weather. Columbia 11 May 1854 (1 item, 2 pages)

Insert 20 Letter to brother just keeping in touch, entertaining the idea of living there with a wife and being healthy. He writes a poem for their mother, saying to cherish your mother and be grateful for her. Columbia California 10 June 1854 (1 item, 2 pages)

Insert 21 Letter to brother stating his good health, happiness in receiving letters from Lancaster and Manheim, and how he buys papers to read about the other states. He details how he's happy because he's in California for the right reasons. He mentions there is a lot more farming going on than when he arrived, over three years ago. He might come home next fall. Columbia California 24 June 1854 (1 item, 4 pages)

Insert 22 Letter to brother stating his satisfaction for earning money looking for gold and not working as hard as his brother, but still making more. He wonders if the girl he left behind in Manheim still loves him, because he loves her and wants her to wait for him. Columbia 27 August 1854 (1 item, 3 pages)

Insert 23 Letter to Miss Miller detailing his regret at not being able to see her when he was visiting Manheim. He knows other men are interested in her, but he demands a meeting with her and will respect her decision then. Lancaster 13 November 1854 (1 item, 1 page)

Folder 2

Insert 1 Original handwritten account, "A Description of Crossing the Desert, " 1850. (*Use transcript in Insert 2, do not use original.*) (1 item, 17 pages)

Insert 2 Typed copy of the above account.

The trek to the desert took 3 months, and their plan was to move during nighttime due to the heat in August. Unfortunately, it was taking longer than they thought and their circumstances turned less than favorable, such as horses dying, not being able to cross rivers, running out of water, some of his group leaving, and trading at high prices with very little provisions. They slowly ran out of money and food, so their group cut grass and sold it, then using their money economically. At another trading post, the group got separated and went on for a while, only finding each other by luck, then running out of money again shortly after reuniting. Continuing along, they came upon a large mountain that is 100 miles from Sacramento that they spent some nights on, traveling with some hunters, and having coffee for dinner and breakfast, borrowing money from a kind stranger to feed their horses. They soon made it into town, ending up at a gambling hotel and then into the camp with the other groups of people searching gold. (1 item, 4 pages)

Folder 3 Composition book containing personal correspondence describing life in California, the area, and the discovery of gold; "Journal of My Voyage from San Francisco to New York," 1854; newspaper images of a gold rush town and the great-granddaughter of John Sutter; and an obituary. (*Use transcript in Folder 4, do not use original.*) (3 items, 144 pages)



Folder 4 Typed copies (in manuscript form): Mr. Hackman's obituary from 1896; correspondence to his brother; and his "Journal of My Voyage from San Francisco to New York." Transcriber unknown. (25 items, 243 pages)

