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Letter from John W. H. Baker to Julia Ann Baker, 1854 Nov. 8 and Nov 13

John W. H. Baker

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Mokelumne Hill Nov 8th 1854

My Dear Wife

Having a little matter of news I thought I would write you a small part of a letter today. There were four of us wanderers from Meriden together last night in my office. when we recounted a few of the circumstances in relation to our former residence in old Meriden. The company consisted of William Shattuck, Edward Fifield, Hosea Couch & myself. Mr. Shattuck came here yesterday and is on a lookout for locating in winter mining quarters. He thinks of going to Campo Seco to see if there is not a chance for him there. He looks very well is fleshy for him, and says he has not been sick a day since he came to California. He tells me that he has been at San Francisco for some 6 or 8 weeks past. I have not yet asked him how he gets along in his operations, but conclude that he has not done much, as Dustin told me he had not when I was at San Francisco. I think he is very correct in his habits as I have heard from him frequently before and have heard that he was a member of the Sons of Temperance and a hardworking, honest miner. I understand he has recently worked only for wages as a hired hand. Couch and Fifield are doing but little more than paying their expenses. It requires men of energy and the best of business tact to be successfull in mining at the present time, and neither of the three are burthened with these qualities. Daniel Bryant talks of coming into this section of country in a few days and thinks of going into some kind of mining business. It think he would do very well after a time but he will need to be very shrewd at first or he will loose. If he has capital to invest in the purchase of a good claim he would do much better than to spend time and money in finding and locating on his own hook, as the saying is. A few days previous to the arrival of Mr. Shattuck here I had a visit from Carlos Dyer. he was well and in good spirits, was looking about for some mining speculation. he stoped only one day. He tells me that he has made nothing of consequence since his return.

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Said he had lost several hundred dollars in his ranching operations.

Ranching is now one of the poorest kinds of business as a general thing as the produce is not of sufficient value to pay the expense of cultivation and transportation, unless situated in the immediate neighborhood of a market. He seems to think mining is the best business after all notwithstanding its uncertainties.

Monday Morn. Nov. 13th

All well, and I must finish my letter today. I suppose you recollect of my writing some time since of the trial and sentence of two men here to be hung on the 10th of the month. That day came on Friday last and previous to the time through the exertions of a portion of the citizens a commutaion of sentence was obtained for one of the men. that one was a gambler by the name of Thompson. and probably the worst king of a man. After his commutation he boasted of the hair-breadth escapes he had undergone in his life, and showed some individual five balls which remain in different portions of his body where he had been shot before in the course of his life. The other man was an Irishman by the name of O'Brien. he killed an Irishman with whom he had been having a fight. (while intoxicated). he was a young man and pretty good looking. He made a confession of the crime and in a few words, spoken to the multitude, previous to his execution. Said he was willing to suffer the penalty the penalty of his crime between the hours of 1 & 2 o'clock on the 10th of Nov. and I assure you it was a melancholy spectacle to see a young man in the prime of life and in good health die upon the gallows--It is the first execution of the kind I have ever seen and I hope it may be the last. I think he would have been as fortunate as Thompson had he possessed either money or influential friends or even had he been an American, I think he never would have been hung for the offence. Thus we see the distress caused by drunkenness, poverty, want of friends, and foreigh birth in the land of crime and gold.

On Thursday evening I had the pleasure of shaking hands with Daniel Bryant. he came up to see our mining region of country and to ascertain whether it would be like to pay him to come into the mines and labor this winter. I showed him over the country around here and he seemed much pleased with his visit. He could not make up his mind whether to come this week for the winter or not. He returned to San Francisco this morning. He said if he did not find some other business to operate upon when he could regulate what he had upon his hands he should come into this section of the country and try his luck at mining. Daniel was in good health, says he has done very well since he came into the country.

Mr. Shattuck went to Campo Seco Nov 8th and I think he may remain there as I have heard nothing from him since. He wished to be remembered to Mr. Baldwin and family--said if he did not succeed there he should return to this place and then go back to his old place, (that is Springfield, Tuolumne County)

It seems from your last letter that you have some Indians in the neighborhood, but I can hardly think they are quite so much of a curiosity as a California Indian would be there. I would like to bring one of the Indian bows and some of their arrows home with me but the trouble of transportation would hardly pay--I suppose the bow that Fred bought will please him some time. I am glad to hear that Sis and Harriet are so well agreed in their plays and I hope they will be very kind to each other and never quarrel.

I am sorry to hear of sickness in Mr. Baldwin's family and hope ere this that every thing has been brought about for their good and that it has been God's pleasure to spare them and restore them again to health.

I am glad to hear that Mother Richardson has taken the pains to visit you. I should have liked to have had her spend the

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winter with you if she could have contented herself to do so. But I suppose she feels more satisfied to live near her old acquaintances and relatives. Our business for the past week has been very light. Smaller than before for a long time. Still is pays very well.

I recieved a letter from Dennison and likewise one from Sophia by the last mail. I have written every thing in relation to his affairs here before I rec'd this last letter from Sophia. I find that reports which John Storrs has the name of circulating here do not agree to many of his friends and to myself he has said he had nothing to show for his claim but his own word, and I believe when he said that he told the truth. I would advise S. to take no further notice of the matter with him. I know from a conversation with Caldwell (O's former partner) that there is not near the amount due to the Company or Companies which S. says John Storrs represented to her that was due. and what amount is due would not pay an administrator of the estate here. Caldwell says he does not think Oliver owed anything in California, at least he knows of no claim against him with the exception of what Storrs says is due him. I put into this letter a gold dollar. it is the only one I have and as I have never sent one to little bub I think this one must be his--

I do not think of anything further this time. Please remember me to Oliver & family--and all enquiring friends. By the way we are having the most delightful kind of weather, mild and warm, and such evenings as are seldom seen in New England--With these few lines accept the love of

Mrs. Julia Ann Baker
Meriden, N. H.

Your Faithfull & Affectionate
Husband
John W. H. Baker