

Guide to the David G. Ferson Correspondence

WA MSS S-1315



by Tina Evans

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: WA MSS S-1315

CREATOR: Ferson, David G.

TITLE: David G. Ferson correspondence

DATES: 1850-1858

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.25 linear feet (1 box)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers contain letters from David G. Ferson in California to his sister Ann A. Ferson in Massachusetts, describing life in the gold fields during the 1850s.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.ferson>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.ferson>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The David G. Ferson Correspondence was purchased in 1988 on the Frederick W. and Carrie S. Beinecke Fund for Western Americana.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The David G. Ferson Correspondence is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

David G. Ferson Correspondence. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Scope and Contents

[The David G. Ferson Correspondence](#) consists of twenty-four letters written by David G. Ferson from the California gold fields to his older brother John Ferson and his sister Ann A. Ferson in Massachusetts. The letters span the dates 1850-58, with the majority dating between 1851 and 1855.

The collection consists of chronologically arranged letters followed by transcripts. The transcripts, prepared by a previous owner of the letters, have not been edited and may be inaccurate. The difficulty of deciphering Ferson's handwriting may account for many of the misspellings in the transcripts, although he does not appear to be well educated and his spelling is inconsistent.

The correspondence begins in June 1850 with a description of Ferson's crossing the Isthmus of Panama. A second letter (dated December 1851 but probably written in December 1850) chronicles his activities in the mines at Shaws Flats, in Tuolumne County California, and includes an account of an encounter between a grizzly bear and one of Ferson's companions.

Ferson remained at Shaws Flats until the end of 1851. His letters document the strained relations between the Americans and Mexicans, and he describes the killing of several Mexicans in fighting between the two groups. A letter dated July 10, 1851 contains a long account of a robbery at Camp Saco and the pursuit, trial, and lynching of the thief. Ferson's lawsuit against a neighboring miner is chronicled in an October letter.

At the end of 1851 Ferson left Shaw Flats and went to Columbia, California. His letters describe the house in which he was living and details concerning a spring water project for Columbia. Two letters from 1852 provide further discussion of the water project as well as information about Ferson's wages, local politics, and the price of clothing and lumber.

Sometime during 1852, Ferson left California. He returned to Columbia, however, in April 1853, and his first letter home reports the death of one of his companions aboard ship. Subsequent letters describe Ferson's wages, the activities of his companions, local politics, and the gambling houses in Columbia. In the fall of 1853 Ferson left Columbia for Campbell Flats to begin farming. The correspondence contains details about the farm and the prices for hens and eggs, as well as a request for farming equipment to be sent to him from home.

Ferson gave up farming in 1854 and apparently spent the year mining at the Algiers Camp. Topics he mentions in his letters include wages and economic conditions, a hanging in Sonora, and the burning of the town of Columbia on July 10, 1854. A letter written from the Algerine Camp in January 1855 vividly describes the murder and robbery of a lumber company merchant in Sonora and the several trials and ultimate lynching of the murderer. In the spring of 1855 Ferson went to Knights Ferry on the Stanislaus River, and two letters home include news of his companions as well as comments on wages and food prices. Ferson's last letter is from Knights Ferry in March 1858. It contains a detailed description of an ambush by Indians of four Stanislaus River Water Company employees near Columbia.

Collection Contents

Box and Folder List, 1850

b. 1, f. 1	Correspondence	1850
b. 1, f. 2	Correspondence	1851
b. 1, f. 3	Correspondence	1852
b. 1, f. 4	Correspondence	1853
b. 1, f. 5	Correspondence	1854
b. 1, f. 6	Correspondence	1855
b. 1, f. 7	Correspondence	1858
b. 1, f. 8	Transcripts	1850
b. 1, f. 9	Transcripts	1851
b. 1, f. 10	Transcripts	1852
b. 1, f. 11	Transcripts	1853
b. 1, f. 12	Transcripts	1854
b. 1, f. 13	Transcripts	1855
b. 1, f. 14	Transcripts	1858

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Agriculture -- California
Crime -- California
Criminals -- California
Frontier and pioneer life -- California
Gold mines and mining -- California
Hydraulic mining -- California
Indians of North America -- California
Lynching -- California
Mexicans -- California
Voyages to the Pacific coast

Geographic Names

Algerine Camp (Calif.)
Algiers Camp (Calif.)
California -- Gold discoveries
Campbell Camp (Calif.)
Columbia (Calif.)
Knights Ferry (Calif.)
Shaws Flat (Calif.)
Sonora (Calif.)
Stanislaus County (Calif.) -- History
Tuolumne County (Calif.) -- History

Occupations

Farmers -- California
Gold miners -- California

Names

Ferson, David G.

Families

Ferson family