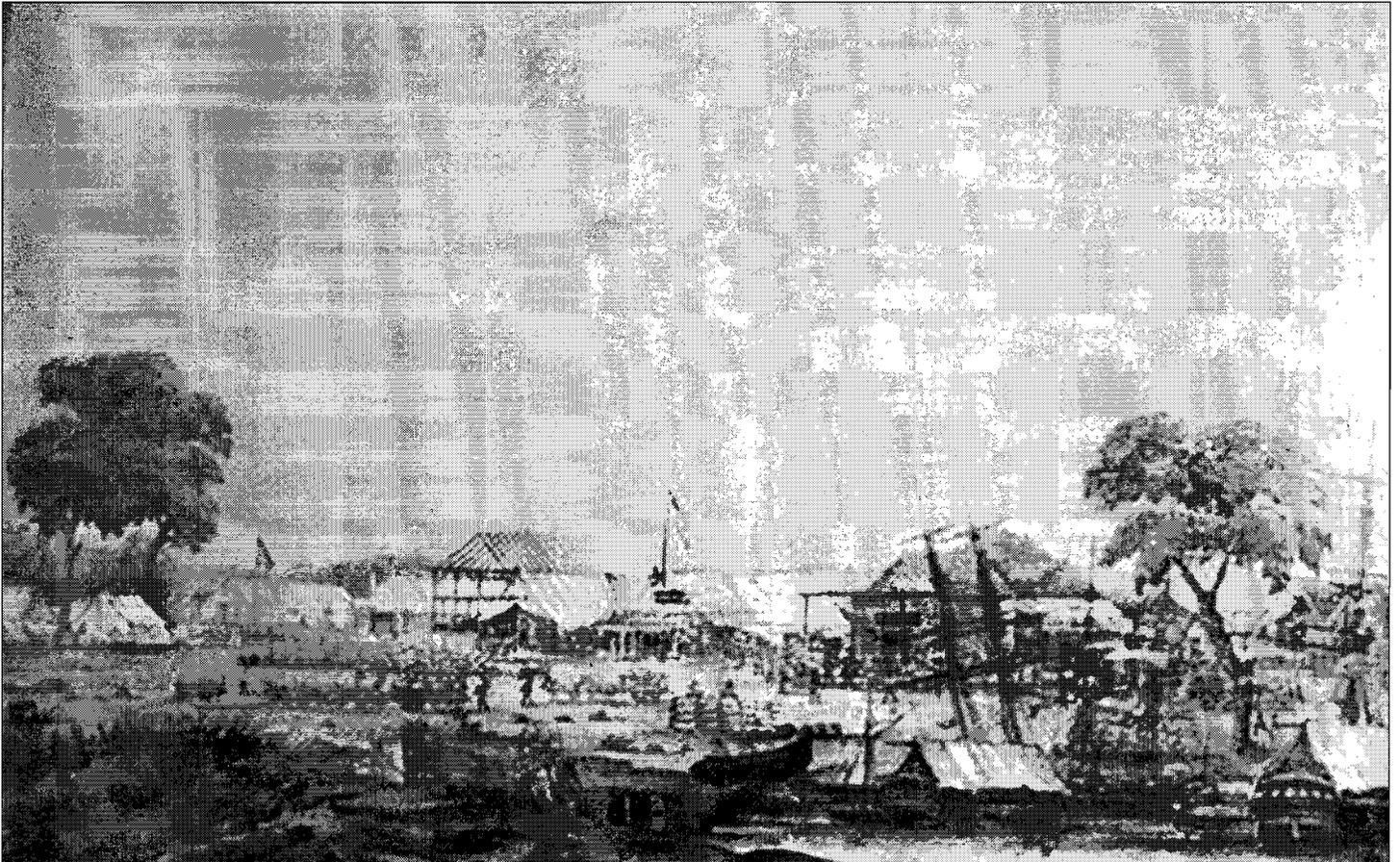


The San Joaquin Historian

View of Stockton, 1849 & The Man Behind The Painting



A Publication of the San Joaquin County
Historical Society and Museum

Spring 2003

Vol. XVII - Number 1

The San Joaquin Historian

A Publication of the San Joaquin County Historical Society & Museum

Vol. XVII - Number 1



Spring 2003

Editor

Donald Walker, Ph.D.

Published by

**The San Joaquin County
Historical Society, Inc.**

Micke Grove Regional Park
P. O. Box 30, Lodi, CA 95241-0030
(209)331-2055 or (209)953-3460

President

Christopher Engh

Vice President/President Elect

Elise Austin Forbes

Immediate Past President

Helen Trethewey

Vice President Finance

Mel Wingett

Vice President Publications

Lisa Dannen

Treasurer

Robert F. McMaster

Director, San Joaquin County Historical Society

Michael W. Bennett

View of Stockton, 1849 &

The Man Behind the Painting

This issue of the *Historian* is devoted to the many tantalizing mysteries surrounding the man who painted the earliest known view of Stockton. Was his name W.H. Cressy? Where did he come from? Where did he get his training? What other works did he paint? How long was he in San Joaquin County? Why did he leave? Where did he go? Research has only just begun on these many related questions and Curator of Collections, Amy Smith, offers us herein a progress report on her findings and those of her colleagues.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Smith was born in Stockton, the daughter of Wilbur Holmes Smith II and Susan Grupe de Polo. She studied Anthropology with an emphasis in Archaeology at the University of California, Berkeley and subsequently received a Master's degree in Museum Studies from the University College in London, England (2000). Amy was first employed as Outreach Coordinator of the Mervyn's Moving Mission Program for the Fresno Metropolitan Museum. Since February 2002, Ms. Smith has been Curator of Collections and Exhibits at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum.

View of Stockton, 1849 & THE MAN BEHIND THE PAINTING
by AMY SMITH

Foreword by Michael W. Bennett, Director, San Joaquin County Historical Society and Museum

The oil painting *View of Stockton, 1849* was first exhibited in the Museum's Helen Weber Kennedy Gallery as a loan from Mrs. Helen Kennedy Cahill (1985). This painting is important because it gives us our earliest view of the gold rush era Stockton. At the time of Mrs. Cahill's loan, we accepted the attribution, supported by *Artists of California, 1786-1940*, that Josiah Perkins Cressy, Captain of the record-setting *Flying Cloud*, had executed the painting.

However, when, in January 2002, Mrs. Cahill gifted the painting to the Museum, we were required by our own standards and policies to commission a condition report by a qualified art conservator and to obtain an appraisal for insurance purposes. In the article that follows, Curator of Collections Amy Smith presents the results of the Museum staff's combined efforts to unravel the origins of *View of Stockton, 1849*. Much time was spent in Massachusetts learning about the Cressy family and trying to establish the viability of the Josiah P. Cressy attribution. Our research led us to reject his authorship in favor of that of W.H Cressy, yet there are still some loose ends and we hope that by reading these findings someone will offer us the missing links to complete a perplexing chapter of our local history.

Many individuals and institutions in both California and Massachusetts aided us in our efforts. Our thanks go to:

Judy Anderson and Darren Brown
(Marblehead MA Historical Society)

Helen Kennedy Cahill

Jill Cogen and Alan Jutzi
(Huntington Library, San Marino CA)

Cheever Cressy
(Aachen Books, Wenham MA)

Capt. Harold F. Lynch
(Boston MA Marine Society)

Britta Karlberg
(Phillips Library of the Peabody Essex Museum, MA)

Tricia Roush and Ken O'Connor
(San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum)

Horace Spencer

Mike Tucker
(Sutter's Fort Museum)

Don Walker
(Holt-Atherton Library, UOP)

The California Historical Society

The Cesar Chavez Stockton Public Library

The F. W. Olin Library, Mills College

Harmony Grove Cemetery, Salem MA

J. Porter Shaw Library, San Francisco National Maritime Museum

Boston Public Library

Museum of the City of New York

National Heritage Museum Library, Lexington MA

Oberlin College Archives

View of Stockton, 1849 is on exhibit in the parlor of the Helen Weber Kennedy Gallery. We hope you will stop in to enjoy this gift.

Written in ink on the back of *View of Stockton*, 1849 (which we shall henceforth refer to simply as *View*) are the words, "... drawn on the spot by W.H. Cressy, October 1849." While this could have been added at any time, we know that the writing is not that of the painting's first owners, Charles and Helen Weber, nor of Weber's business agent, L.M. Cutting. The donor, Mrs. Cahill, has confirmed that the script resembles neither that of her mother, Helen Weber Kennedy, nor that of her Aunt, Julia Weber.

In a *Stockton Daily Independent* article regarding the success of the German Sanitary Fund Auction (September 10, 1870) it is noted that "a relic of '49, representing a view of Stockton taken in 1849 by C.M. Cressy, donated by Captain C.M. Weber, were sold at a handsome figure" (9-12-1870). Perhaps this is where the Cressy enigma began. Was this an editorial mistake influenced by Captain Weber's initials of C.M.?

An early facsimile of *View*, published in the Thompson and West *History of San Joaquin County, California* (1879), is accompanied by the statement that "The original of this was painted by W.H. Creasey for C.M. Weber on Oct. 1849." The Haggin Museum in Stockton owns a watercolor that is very similar to the oil painting under discussion. This work is not signed, but was attributed to W. H. Creasy by the L.M. Cutting family who gifted the painting to the Haggin in the 1930s. George Hammond, Director of the Bancroft Library, published a photograph of *View* in *Captain Charles M. Weber* (1966). Hammond attributes the work to W.H. Cressy.

By contrast, J.P. Cressy was not credited as the painter of *View* until the painting was shown in an exhibition at the

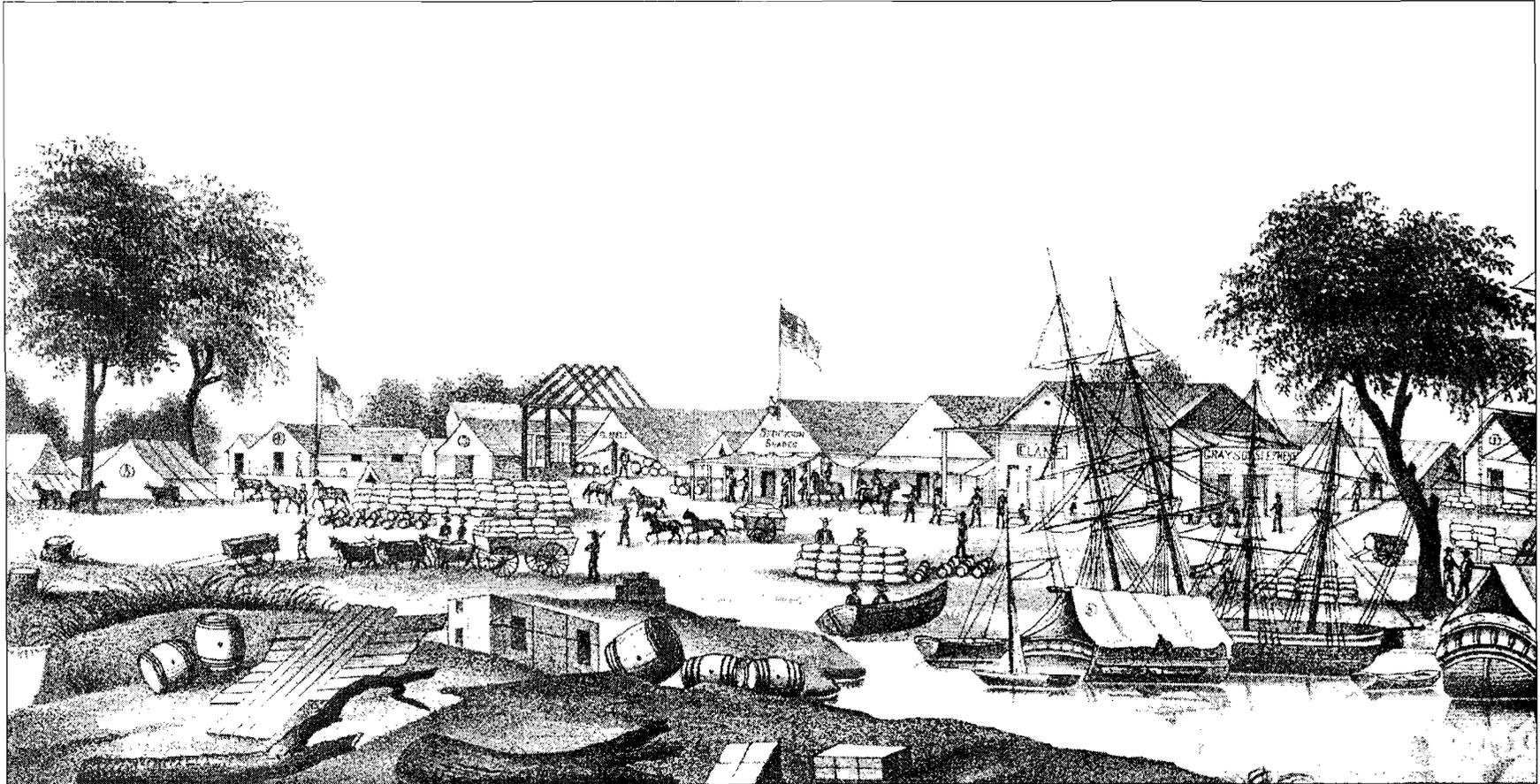
Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. (1950). The Corcoran has no documentation for this accreditation.

Ernest W. Cressey's *The Story of Your Ancestors: Cressey, 286 Years in America* (1935) proved a valuable resource in locating several Cressys in 19th century California. However, only two of the men bearing the name listed in this work (variously spelled Creesy, Creasy, Cressy, or Creasey) were here before 1850, and these did not arrive until November 1849 (after *View* was painted).

Captain Josiah Perkins Cressy, who set a world record by sailing the *Flying Cloud* from New York to San Francisco in 89 days, 21 hours (1851), arrived in New York on a voyage from the Orient in late April 1849. It seems unlikely that he would have set sail for California earlier than the end of June 1849, and, even if he had done so, Capt. Cressy would probably not have arrived on the Pacific Coast before late August. This might have allowed him time to go to Stockton and to complete *View* by October 1849, but there is no evidence that he had business in our city, nor that he was an amateur painter, nor that he knew Capt. Charles Weber for whom the painting was done.

The 1850 Federal Census for California lists three Cressys: Robert Cressey of Mariposa County; James D. Cressy of San Joaquin County; and, Samuel Cresy of Sutter County. No W.H. Cressy appears in the 1850 California census although a painter bearing this name is mentioned in the *Stockton Times* more than once during that year.

J. D. Cressy was a prominent real estate dealer on Hunter Street in Stockton during the early 1850s. The San Joaquin County Deed Books mention a John D.



Thompson & West *History of San Joaquin County* (1879)

“The original of this was painted by W.H. Creasey for C.M. Weber in Oct. 1849”

Cressy, including: in 1850 a Stockton lot sale between John D. Cressy and D.S. Terry and R.P. Ashe (vol. 1, 163), and in 1853 a Stockton lot sale where Cressy acted as lawful agent for one W.W. Boyden of New Orleans (vol. 4, p. 449). According to *Bonds, Commissions & C. Book "G"*, John D. Cressy granted a bond to John D. Cory on May 13, 1853. One problem with these records is that they name the agent John D. Cressy, so it isn't possible to be absolutely sure that he is James D. Cressy from the 1850 Federal Census.

The 1852 State Census describes J. D. Cressy as an Englishman who came to California from Chile. During February 1852 this Cressy operated the Theatre Saloon in Stockton's Corinthian Building. He apparently acted as a booking agent for the Corinthian Theatre. The March 27, 1852 issue of the *San Joaquin Republican* quotes a letter from Cressy in which he states that he will soon have signed one Signora Biscaccianti to perform at the Corinthian. Unfortunately, James Cressy is not mentioned again in the *Republican* and on April 7th the newspaper reported that the Theatre Saloon had "reopened" under the management of a Mr. Dexter. Signora Biscaccianti did finally perform, in August, at the Corinthian, but James Cressy is nowhere mentioned in accounts of her Stockton appearances.

James D. is not listed in the 1856 Stockton Directory or in the 1860 Federal Census. Where did he go? Did he return to Chile or England? In 1863, an article in the *Stockton Daily Independent* discusses the benefit of Captain Cressy, a wealthy Stockton pioneer, it reports that "In 1855, he removed to San Francisco, where he has since been well known by his connection with various theatres" (9-21-63). Is this James D. Cressy?

Whether W.H. Cressy, the artist, was related to James D. Cressy, the theatre agent, has yet to be determined, but it is clear that both men were intimately involved with the affairs of the Corinthian Theatre during its first years of operation, and had ties with the Republic of Chile. Based on the Federal Census of 1852 James arrived from Chile and W.H. Cressy is mentioned in the *Book "A" Deeds* as being "of the Republic of Chili". Our research has yet to follow the name Cressy to the Republic of Chile.

According to local press accounts, W.H. Cressy worked in Stockton between 1849 and 1851. His first name is confirmed as William in the *Book "A" Deeds* in his purchase of Rough and Ready Farm 78 acres from a J.F. Stephens (vol. 2, p. 115). He was the interior designer of a theater in the Corinthian Building on Weber Point. This playhouse opened August 17, 1850 and the *Stockton Times* for that date notes that "the scenery was designed under superintendence of W. H. Cressy, our talented fellow townsman and artist." The *Times* reveals that Cressy painted landscapes on large panels, which slid together to create stage backdrops.

While working at the Corinthian Theater, we are told, Cressy was also working on a separate project involving a large mural of Stockton. In a recently published volume, *The Gold Rush Diary of Ramon Navarro*, Mr. Navarro states that on December 23, 1850 he chatted with a Mr. Cresi who had a painting of Stockton, which was then boxed for shipping. Navarro describes the work as a "charming panoramic view of Stockton divided by the river, with its sailing vessels and steam ships, etc. In it you can see each and every house with its name and exact color." But was the work ever shipped and where was it shipped?

On June 18, 1851 W.H. Cressy is referred to in the *San Joaquin Republican* as the "chefd'eurve [sic] of Panoramas." On that same day, the artist took out a newspaper advertisement titled "Splendid Work of Art For Sale." In this advertisement Cressy describes panoramas he has been working on for the past year depicting the principal cities of California. These "drawings were taken on the spot, and for correctness may be relied upon," according to the *Republican*.

The following week (June 25th) the same newspaper ran an article titled, "Cressy's Panorama of California." Five of the artist's paintings, on exhibit in the Corinthian Building, were briefly described. One work depicted the Golden Gate cliffs and promontories with large ships sailing the Pacific Coast in the foreground. A second panorama, titled *San Francisco in 1849* and said to have been recorded on the 3rd of July, showed the *Philadelphia* burning in the harbor, the Long Wharf under construction, a primitive Montgomery Street coursing along the beach and Happy Valley smiling in the distant rural background. A third painting, *View of Sutter's Mill and Coloma Valley*, depicts that rolling green valley prior to Marshall's gold discovery. Panorama number four, *Stockton, as it appeared before the late fire*, seems to have been painted from atop the Corinthian Building looking west toward Mount Diablo. The fifth panorama was titled *Quartz Mountains of Carson and the Cities of Sonoma and Jamestown*.

The fourth panorama's title resembles the scene described in Navarro's *Gold Rush Diary*. It seems possible that the painting Navarro saw in December 1850 survived the Stockton fire of May 5, 1851 and that this panorama was that same work. But why was it packed for shipping in December and then on exhibit seven months later in the same

location? Had Cressy shipped the painting to San Francisco, failed to sell it, then brought it back to Stockton? A search of the San Francisco newspapers of the period has uncovered nothing. And what of the other panoramas? Their condition and location(s) is today unknown. Since the *San Joaquin Republican* tells us that each view was twenty feet wide by nine feet tall, it would seem that the paintings, were they still extant, would be difficult to hide.

One Dr. Robinson, who, though based in San Francisco, managed the Corinthian Theatre in January and February 1852 and certainly knew James D. Cressy well, is known to have had several panoramas made for use in his production *The Past, Present, and Future of California*. Robinson took this show east in 1856, but died in Mobile, Alabama, before he could reach his destination. Dr. Robinson might have had the Cressy panoramas and they may have been lost on his abortive trip east, but this is speculation.

One unattributed lithograph in the Honeyman Collection at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley may have been copied from Cressy's second panorama, *San Francisco in 1849*. The title of Cressy's work is identical to that of the print. The ship burning to the right in the background is the *Philadelphia*. The pathway along the shore could be Montgomery Street and the proportions seem approximately those of the twenty by nine feet original. Stylistically, the American flag on the left side of the landscape is very similar to one flying in *View*. Still, it is not really possible to be certain that this engraving is based upon a Cressy because there are so few examples of the artist's work for comparison.

From April through December 1849 two hundred thirty-three vessels arrived in San Francisco waters. Passengers on these ships were actors and actresses who subsequently

appeared in California theaters. Benjamin Noid, author of a doctoral dissertation at the University of Utah titled *History of the Theatre in Stockton, Ca., 1850-1892* (1969), claims to have read over 12,000 local newspapers in the course of his research. Noid mentions Cressy as a scenic designer in Stockton, who was possibly elevated to Captain. It can be assumed that Noid confused W.H. Cressy with Captain J.D. Cressy. We have noted that the artist worked on sets for the Corinthian Theatre. When the Corinthian was closed temporarily in February 1851, and the luxury El Placer Theatre opened on El Dorado Street, W.H. Cressy was involved in scenery and set design there, according to the *Stockton Times* (2-2-51; 2-5-51).

Cressy doubtless had the opportunity to meet two of California's most esteemed actors, James Stark, and his wife, Sarah Kirby, who performed regularly in San Francisco, Sacramento and Stockton between 1850 and 1853. If Stark and Kirby hired W.H. Cressy as their set designer, he might have departed Stockton with them for the Australian gold fields in 1853. The two actors reportedly returned to California less than two years later richer by \$100,000. In 1856 they sailed to Victoria, Australia for another run on the theater circuit. According to the *Alta California*, they returned to California's theatres in 1858. McKean Buchanan, another Stockton performer, also sailed to Australia but in 1857. It is not too far-fetched to explain W.H. Cressy's sudden disappearance from California newspapers by suggesting that he emigrated to Australia with his theatrical friends.

It is true that research in the New South Wales immigrant index for 1844-1859, has failed to discover Cressy's name; but neither did it turn up those of Kirby, Stark or Buchanan. The Australian National Maritime Museum is currently running an

exhibition titled *Gold Fever!* in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Australian gold rush. The exhibition focuses on the cultural and social aspect of people's experiences during this era, with an emphasis on personal belongings and forms of entertainment. For whatever reason, W.H. Cressy is not recognized in the text of this exhibit, nor in other Australian, Canadian or British sources examined by the author.

Unfortunately, W.H. Cressy is not mentioned in the Stockton theatre after 1852. According to the *San Joaquin Republican* (10-8-53), a Mr. Archer was responsible for the scenery of the newly built Stockton Theatre. W.H. Cressy's name does appear in the *Book "A" Deeds* when he was "attorney in fact" for Caroline and Florentine Cressy of Chile in the 1854 sale of certain Stockton city lots (vol. 5, p. 244). Unfortunately, his relationship with either of these women remains undetermined. Cressy's name is not to be found in San Francisco or Sacramento directories, nor in the 1860 Federal Census for California. Evidently, he had left the state, but for what locale? Given the limitations of record keeping in mid-19th c. California, this is a mystery that may never be solved.

Thank you for your interest in this short journey of discovery. We hope time and friends will help us learn the rest of this story. Until then, we will exhibit the *View of Stockton, 1849* by W.H. Cressy, proudly and appreciatively as Mrs. Cahill and the Weber/Kennedy families have held it for over 150 years.

The Stockton Times (1850-51)

The San Joaquin County *Book "A" of Deeds*, vol. 1-5. (1850-1854)

The San Joaquin County *Bonds, Commissions & C. Book "G" Misc. Instruments* 1850-1856, p. 106 (5-13-1853)

BILIOGRAPHY

Brereton, Roslyn. "The Glamorous Gold Rush: Great Stage Stars in California and Victoria in the 1850s," *Pacific Historian* 13:3 (Summer 1969).

Cressey, Ernest W. *The Story of Your Ancestors: Cressy, 286 Years in America* friends. (1935).

Ernst, Alice H. *Trouping in the Oregon Country, A History of Frontier Theatre* (1961).

Estavan, Lawrence, ed. San Francisco *Theatre Research: Monographs---The Starks...*, vol. 3 (WPA, 1938).

Estavan, Lawrence, ed. San Francisco *Theatre Research: Theatre Buildings*, Vol. 15, pt. 1 (WPA, 1938).

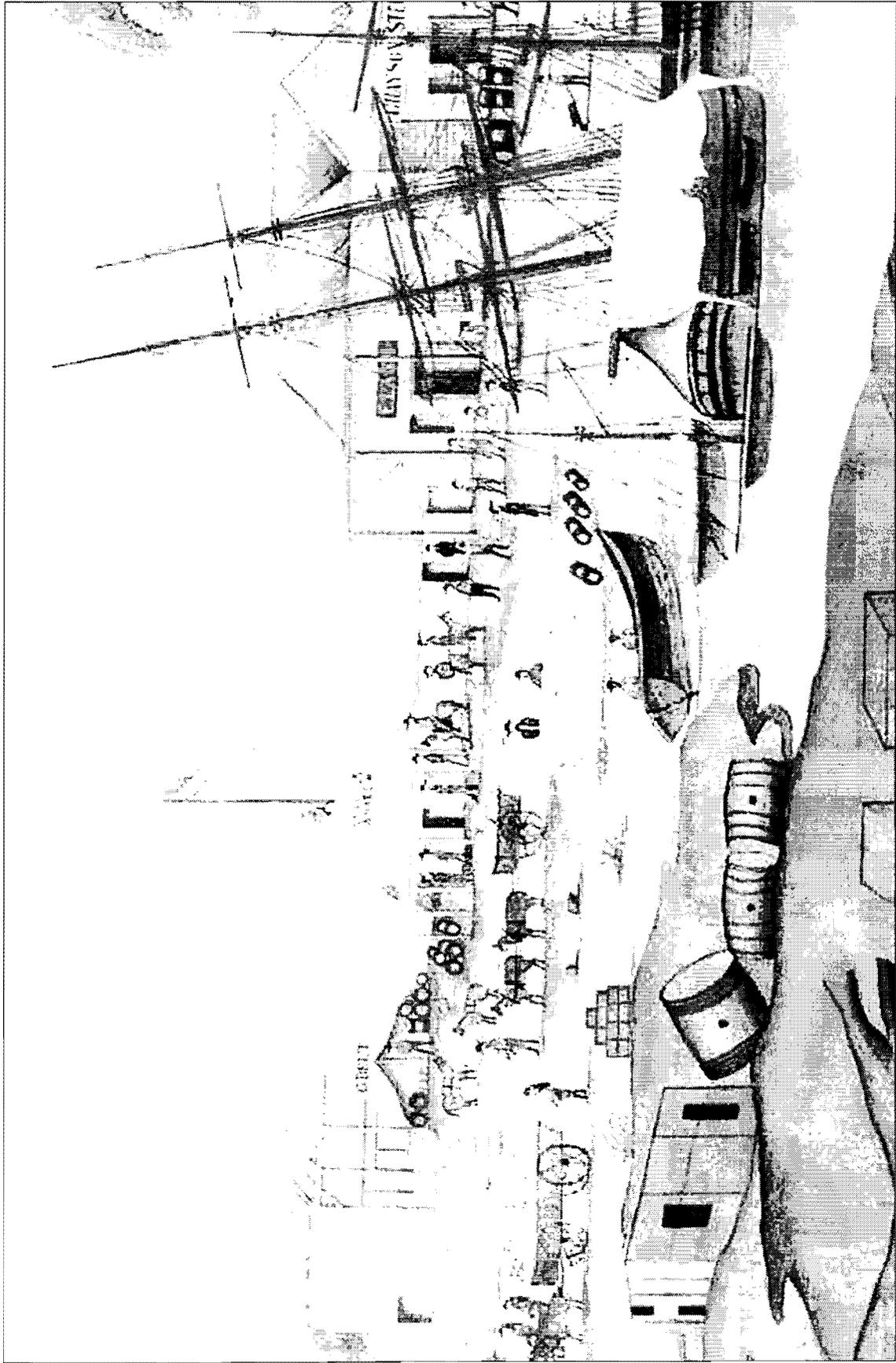
Ferreyra, Maria del Carmen & Davis S. Rehr, eds. *The Gold Rush Diary of Ramon Navarro* (2000).

Hammond, George P. and Dale L. Morgan. *Captain Charles M. Weber, Pioneer of the San Joaquin and Founder of Stockton* (1966).

Noid, Benjamin M. *History of the Theatre in Stockton, 1850-1892* (1968).

The Alta California (1850-52)

The San Joaquin Republican (1851-52)



Stockton in 1849 [watercolor in Haggin Museum, Stockton]

Address Correction Requested

San Joaquin County
Historical Society and Museum
P.O. Box 30
Lodi, CA 95241-0030

Non-Profit
Organization
POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 48
Lodi, CA 95241