David Vaught on Sources Used in *After the Gold Rush*

[Editor's Introduction: Responding to my request for a "Chapter" for this web site, David Vaught has provided an abstract of his in press book, *After the Gold Rush*, and a copy of his "Essay on Sources" to appear in that book. These are excellent additions to this site that all students of Davis history will certainly enjoy. *John Lofland*]

[Abstract of *After the Gold Rush: Dreams of Striking it Rich in the Sacramento Valley*, David Vaught (Johns Hopkins University Press, in press)]

"It is a glorious country," exclaimed Stephen J. Field, the future U.S. Supreme Court justice, upon arriving in California in 1849 for the Gold Rush. Field's pronouncement was more than just an expression of exuberance. For an electrifying moment, he and his fellow Argonauts found themselves face-to-face with something commensurate to their capacity to dream. Many of the more than 100,000 miners were farmers, most of whom failed to hit pay dirt in gold but remained in the state to try their luck at wheat, cattle, and fruit. Theirs is a remarkable if obscure story. Like Field, they never forgot that first "glorious" moment in California when anything seemed possible. The sheer excitement, intensity of expectation, and high drama of the Gold Rush motivated and haunted them for the rest of their lives.

Intended for a broad audience, scholars and general readers alike, this empirically-rich narrative examines the miners-turned-farmers who settled along Putah Creek in the lower Sacramento Valley. Readers will get to know many of them on a personal level. In their efforts to strike it rich in California after the Gold Rush, the Pierces, Greenes, Montgomerys, Careys, and others tried to replicate the Midwest, "back home" to most of them. That meant committing themselves not only to materialistic goals but to community life as well. While their basic values—hard work, mutuality,

family, religion—did not change, the pressure to live up to them increased enormously. Admitting failure a second time would simply not be an option, even with the ravages of flood and drought, monumental disputes over Mexican land titles, mass confusion over land policy, and the vagaries of local, national, and world markets that made farming in the Sacramento Valley an immense challenge. Their dramatic story, in its broadest sense, is an extended commentary on American optimism and hard work—a true-to-life allegory of the American dream amid the harsh realities of life in rural California after the Gold Rush.

["Essay on Sources," to appear in *After the Gold Rush: Dreams of Striking it Rich in the Sacramento Valley*, David Vaught (Johns Hopkins University Press, in press)]

After the Gold Rush is grounded in a wide range of primary sources and an expansive, if uneven, body of secondary literature. This short essay highlights the evidence and interpretations most crucial to the making of this narrative. For additional bibliographical information and complete citations, readers should consult the chapter notes.

Over three decades ago, W. N. Davis Jr. of the California State Archives published a lengthy, two-part article in the California Historical Quarterly with the rather unassuming title, "Research Uses of County Court Records, 1850-1879: And Incidental Intimate Glimpses of California Life and Society" 52 (Fall and Winter 1973): 241-266, 338-365. "County Court records," he began, "are a rich and virtually untapped resource for historical research." They are, he stressed, "valuable sources for social, economic, biographical, genealogical, and legal history" that often "reveal the people candidly and factually in their vernacular, colloquial, and earthy dress" (241, 244). While genealogists

have flocked to county archives in subsequent years to exploit these records, historians have by and large steered clear of them. These small and often isolated facilities are not nearly as glamorous as the Bancroft or the Huntington libraries and often much more difficult to access, but they hold materials every bit as rich—not only civil, criminal, and probate court case files, but land records (deeds, mortgages, leases), assessment rolls, church, school, and marriage records, obituaries, directories, board of supervisors minutes, newspapers, photographs, and a whole host of other documents that offer researchers much more than "incidental intimate glimpses of life and society," Davis's modest subtitle notwithstanding. Indeed, county records (primarily Yolo, but also Sacramento, Solano, and Placer) are the foundation of this book.

State and federal court records proved invaluable as well. Researchers will find themselves rooting for county cases to be appealed to the California Supreme Court, where the documents—full transcripts of testimony, in particular—are often even richer (and more legible). Pierce v. Robinson (1859), Beatty v. Clark (1861), Dresbach v. His Creditors (1881), and Brown v. Greene (1884), for example, yield an almost inexhaustible amount of material on the economic and social development of Putah Creek/Davisville, much of which exists nowhere else. The case files of the California Land Commission, located at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, not only document the specific legal issues concerning the 813 Mexican and Spanish land grants, but also provide insights into each grant's complicated history, the particular region's environment, and the personalities of the litigants and their lawyers. The land case "dockets" kept by the U.S. General Land Office, also at the Bancroft Library on microfilm, contain appeals, affidavits, correspondence, and other materials pertaining to

controversies that arose after the federal government issued patents. The Rancho Los Putos docket, for example, proved just as valuable for this study as the land case itself.

A number of other archival sources supplement the case files and dockets. At the National Archives, the Records of the Department of the Interior (RG 48) and the Department of Justice (RG 60) contain extensive correspondence between federal and state officials on California land grants, while the Records of the General Land Office (RG 49) have township tract books, land entry files, maps, and more correspondence. Federal, state, and county surveyor records (field notes, maps, and still more correspondence) can be found, respectively, at the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, California State Office and the California State Archives, both in Sacramento, and the Yolo County Surveyor's Office, Woodland. Indispensable for Rancho Laguna de Santos Callé is the thick folder of documents in box 816, U.S. Land Office, Sacramento, Records, California State Library, Sacramento. Attorney John Curry's recollections, "History of the Spanish Grants of Solano County" (1907), Law Library, University of California, Berkeley, are illuminating as well.

Individual experiences such as Curry's are the driving force of this narrative. In this regard, no one source proved more revealing than the Pierce Family Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of California Library, Davis. Account books, employee time logs, promissory and bank notes, receipts, correspondence, photographs, and especially the daily journals of George and George Jr. constitute, in my judgment, the single most valuable archival collection for California rural history. A close second might be the Jerome C. Davis Papers, California State Library, especially the five large ranch ledgers that document in minute detail the dramatic rise and fall of

this key figure's prize-winning stock farm. Schedules from both the population and agricultural censuses for Putah and Tremont townships, assessment rolls and lists, and several county histories and maps from both California and a number of midwestern states (cited in the notes) allowed me to track individual removal patterns, persistence rates, squatter-landowner relations, and the development of the region's farm lands. Though Putah Creek/Davisville did not sustain its own newspaper for more than a few months at a time until 1898, residents could read about themselves, their neighbors, and their community in the Sacramento Daily Union and Daily Alta California (especially before the Civil War), Knights Landing News, Yolo County Democrat, Yolo Weekly Mail, Solano Press, Weekly Solano Republican, and Dixon Tribune. The California Farmer and Pacific Rural Press are also very informative.

Putah Creek itself plays a central role in this historical drama. Descriptions of its volatile behavior can be gleaned from newspapers, Land Commission records, and the Pierce daily journals, among numerous other sources. Various reclamation projects, including the several abortive attempts to construct the Putah canal, are documented in Swampland District No. 18 records, Yolo County Archives; state supreme court case Cowell v. Armstrong (1930); and "Why Putah Creek Changed its Course," an undated clipping (ca. 1968) from the Dixon Tribune, on file at the Dixon Public Library. On early irrigation efforts and the controversies that ensued, see especially, "Sub-Irrigation as Practiced on Mr. Briggs' Vineyard and Orchard Near Davisville," William Hammond Hall Papers, California State Archives; various records of the Putah Creek Water Company in the Yolo County Archives and the Pierce Family Papers; and state supreme court cases Carey v. Treat (1889) and Cowell v. Carey (1895). On weather in the

Sacramento Valley, see W. H. Fraser, "Rainfall and Wheat in California," Overland Monthly 33 (January 1899): 521-533.

Wheat is another main "character." Here again, the Pierce Papers provide unparalleled, on-the-ground insights into production, labor, technology, and marketing. Other useful information can be found in several contemporary articles, including three authored by Horace Davis (one at the beginning of the wheat boom in 1868 and two at the end in 1894 and 1898), Joseph Hutchinson's essay in the Overland Monthly in 1883, Alfred Bannister's in 1888, and the long, detailed report distributed by the San Francisco Produce Exchange in 1887 entitled, "Wheat: An Illustrated Description of California's Leading Industry," copy in the Bancroft Library. The rise and fall of the "Grain King" and his Davisville prodigy are documented in William Dresbach's bankruptcy trial and several other court cases; his store ledgers for the late 1860s and crop mortgages for the 1870s, both at the Yolo County Archives; and numerous newspaper clippings on Isaac Friedlander in the Mrs. Amelia Ransome Neville Scrapbooks at the California Historical Society in San Francisco. On the Grange, see especially Greene v. Meyer (1877); Frank T. Gilbert, The Illustrated Atlas and History of Yolo County (San Francisco: De Pue and Co., 1879); Ezra S. Carr, The Patrons of Husbandry on the Pacific Coast (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Co., 1875); and the many newspapers already noted.

The next generation and the shift from wheat to fruit are documented in rich detail in the daily journals and ranch records of George W. Pierce Jr. Also valuable are the incorporation papers of the California Silk Company and the Oak Shade Fruit Company, the many bankruptcy trials in Yolo County during the 1890s, especially that of Davisville merchant B. F. Ligget, and the many lawsuits filed against Emma Briggs that same

decade—all at the Yolo County Archives. The Dixon Tribune and the Davisville Enterprise proved particularly useful for this period. On almonds, see the several essays published by Webster Treat of the Oak Shade Fruit Company and Pierce Jr. cited in the notes; the Constitution and Minute Book of the Davisville Almond Growers' Association and other marketing records at the Sacramento Archives and Museum Center; numerous articles in the California Fruit Grower; and Caroline M. Olney, "Orchards, Vineyards, and Farms in Yolo County," Overland Monthly 40 (May 1902): 171-194. For a contemporary fruit enthusiast's observations, see N. P. Chipman's series of "Wheat v. Fruit" articles published in the Pacific Rural Press (among other places) in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

Regarding the secondary literature, despite the crop's prominence, there is only a fragmented history of wheat farming in California. Historians have examined in considerable detail the development of the wheat belt on the western edge of the Midwest, from the Dakotas down to Kansas and into northern Texas, particularly in the 1880s. But for much of that decade, no state produced more wheat than California. Nearly all the state's famous valleys—not only Sacramento but San Joaquin, Napa, Sonoma, Santa Clara (now "Silicon"), Salinas, San Fernando—were planted in wall-to-wall wheat at the time. Moreover, California began establishing its reputation as the "granary of the world" as early as the late 1850s, a full generation before wheat gained prominence on the Great Plains. Yet, the two best books covering California's wheat era—Michael J. Gillis and Michael F. Magliari, John Bidwell and California: The Life and Writings of a Pioneer, 1841-1900 (Spokane, Wash.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2003), and Donald J. Pisani, From the Family Farm to Agribusiness: The Irrigation Crusade in

California and the West, 1850-1891 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)—address the subject in considerable depth, but only as a secondary issue.

Part of my research strategy has been to draw from the traditional themes of agricultural history—production, distribution, technology, and government policy. In this regard, there is no shortage of secondary sources. The three classic articles published by Rodman Paul (two in 1958, the other in 1973) and the four less-well-known but equally valuable by Morton Rothstein (1963, 1969, 1975, 1987), all cited in the notes many times, provide an abundance of sources, information, and interpretations. Rothstein's short study, The California Wheat Kings (Davis: University of California, Davis, 1987); Gilbert C. Fite, The Farmers' Frontier, 1865-1900 (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), chapter nine; Kenneth A. Smith, "California: The Wheat Decades" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1969); Hugh M. Hoyt Jr., "The Wheat Industry in California, 1850-1910" (M.A. thesis, Sacramento State College, 1953); and Margery Holburne Saunders, "California Wheat, 1867-1910: Influences of Transportation on the Export Trade and the Location of Producing Areas" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1960), should be consulted as well. Rarely cited but very informative is Forest G. Hill, "Place of the Grain Trade in California Economic Development, 1870-1900," Social Science Research Council, Western Committee on Regional Economic Analysis, Proceedings, 1954, manuscript copy in the Bancroft Library. On labor, see Richard Steven Street, "Tattered Shirts and Ragged Pants: Accommodation, Protest, and the Coarse Culture of California Wheat Harvesters and Threshers, 1866-1900," Pacific Historical Review 67 (November 1998): 573-608.

Land policy in particular has drawn considerable scholarly attention. No one has understood California's highly complex land system better than Paul Wallace Gates, whose many penetrating essays on the subject have been collected in one volume, Land and Law in California: Essays on Land Policy (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991). Gates's California Ranchos and Farms, 1846-1862 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967) is also very useful. Donald J. Pisani has deepened our understanding of several of Gates's main themes in two path-breaking articles of his own: "Squatter Law in California, 1850-1858" and "Land Monopoly in Nineteenth-Century California," both in his Water, Land, and Law in the West: The Limits of Public Policy, 1850-1920 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 57-85, 86-101. Also valuable are Christian G. Fritz, Federal Justice in California: The Court of Ogden Hoffman, 1851-1891 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) and Richard H. Peterson, "The Failure to Reclaim: California State Swamp Land Policy and the Sacramento Valley, 1850-1866," Southern California Quarterly 56 (Spring 1974): 45-60.

My primary objective, however, has been to write a "new" rural history—that is, a book that examines wheat farmers in their social and cultural contexts. Much of what we know about farm life in California during this period comes from contemporary critics, most notably land-reformer Henry George (of "single tax" fame) and muckraking novelist Frank Norris (The Octopus). That approach has focused scholarly attention on the largest farmers, especially Hugh Glenn, whose empire of 66,000 acres in the northern Sacramento Valley seduced, among many others, William Dresbach. Many things about nineteenth-century California seem larger than life, but Glenn was hardly representative of the state's thousands of much smaller wheat farmers, who have all but disappeared

from view in the literature. The most insightful treatment, though it is concerned primarily with the tail end of the state's wheat era, is Michael F. Magliari, "California Populism, A Case Study: The Farmers' Alliance and People's Party in San Luis Obispo County, 1885-1903" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Davis, 1992). And Gerald Prescott analyzes small grain farmers in "Farm Gentry vs. the Grangers: Conflict in Rural America," California Historical Quarterly 56 (Winter 1977/1978): 328-345. Other social histories of rural California in the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, remain few and far between. For that matter, even Glenn has received minimal attention, the only full-length treatment being Jimmy V. Allen, "Hugh Glenn" (M.A. thesis, Sacramento State College, 1970).

For useful models, therefore, I had to look elsewhere—the Midwest, primarily, where the new rural history has flourished. Six books in particular have greatly influenced my thinking: John Mack Faragher, Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Jon Gjerde, The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Susan E. Gray, The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); R. Douglas Hurt, Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992); Hurt, The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); and Susan Sessions Rugh, Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). Since most of the historical actors in After the Gold Rush migrated from the Midwest, these books also provide

invaluable source material. For an explanation of why rural social history has flourished in the Midwest but not in California, see my "State of the Art—Rural History, or Why is There No Rural History of California?" Agricultural History 74 (Fall 2000): 759-774.

We know much more, therefore, about farmers before they migrated to California than after. To put it another way, farmers who have been so closely studied in the Midwest were, essentially, the same people whom we know so little about in California. This historiographical disjuncture is all the more jarring when we factor in how much we know about farmers' experiences in the interim—the few months, on average, that they spent mining for gold in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Of the literally hundreds of books and articles written on the Gold Rush, three studies in particular have expanded our knowledge of miner culture well beyond the prevailing get-rich-quick emphasis: H. W. Brands, The Age of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the New American Dream (New York: Doubleday, 2002); Malcolm J. Rohrbough, Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Kevin Starr, Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), chapter two. Though the conventional wisdom does not reflect it, wheat culture in subsequent decades was equally nuanced and complex.

There was more to agriculture along Putah Creek than wheat, of course. On cattle ranching, particularly during the 1850s and 1860s, the essential study is Hazel Adele Pulling, "A History of California's Range-Cattle Industry, 1770-1912" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1944). Three sources that supplement Pulling nicely are Terry G. Jordan, North American Cattle-Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Ray August,

"Cowboys v. Ranchers: The Origins of Western American Law," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 96 (April 1993): 457-488; and Gates, California Ranchos and Farms, chapter two. On the transition to specialty crops, Paul Rhode, "Learning, Capital Accumulation, and the Transformation of California Agriculture," Journal of Economic History 55 (December 1995): 773-800, provides the most sophisticated analysis. See also the appropriate chapters in Rodman Paul, The Far West and the Great Plains in Transition, 1859-1900 (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); and my Cultivating California: Growers, Specialty Crops, and Labor, 1875-1920 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

I have also benefited from many fine environmental histories of the Sacramento Valley. Two pioneer studies by Kenneth Thompson—"Riparian Forests of the Sacramento Valley, California," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 51 (September 1961): 294-314; and "Historic Flooding of the Sacramento Valley," Pacific Historical Review 29 (September 1960): 349-360—are still immensely helpful, as are several chapters in Elna Bakker, An Island Called California: An Ecological Introduction to Its Natural Communities (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). Jeffrey F. Mount, California Rivers and Streams: The Conflict Between Fluvial Process and Land Use (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) helped me understand Putah Creek's ever-changing behavior. Robert Kelley, Battling the Inland Sea: American Political Culture, Public Policy, and the Sacramento Valley, 1850-1986 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), was an instant classic on the subject. Stephen Johnson, Gerald Haslam, and Robert Dawson, The Great Central Valley: California's Heartland (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), document their observations with

beautiful photographs. And Mike Madison, A Sense of Order: The Rural Landscape of Lower Putah Creek (Winters: Yolo Press, 2002) offers a provocative modern-day perspective.

Finally, local, county, and regional histories, though often discounted, provide valuable biographical, geographical, and community information. No one secondary source proved more beneficial to me, in fact, than Joann Leach Larkey, Davisville '68: The History and Heritage of the City of Davis, Yolo County, California (Davis: Davis Historical and Landmarks Commission, 1969), whose scope of analysis is much broader than the title suggests. Joann L. Larkey and Shipley Walters, Yolo County: Land of Changing Patterns (Northridge: Windsor Publications, 1987); Larkey, Winters: A Heritage of Horticulture, A Harmony of Purpose (Woodland: Yolo County Historical Society, 1991); Walters, Knights Landing: The River, the Land, and the People (Woodland: Yolo County Archives, 1992); Walters, Woodland, City of Trees: A History (Woodland: Yolo County Historical Society, 1995); and John Lofland, Davis: Radical Changes, Deep Constants (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), were also quite useful. Wood Young, Vaca- Peña Los Putos Rancho and the Peña Adobe (Vallejo: Wheeler Printing and Publishing, 1971), describes the two Solano County land grants in my study in some detail. Joseph A. McGowan, History of the Sacramento Valley, 3 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1961) remains the best survey of the region.