

**The Country Is Healthy, and Religion Desirable:**

**The Letters of Rev. Thomas Oliver Ellis, MD**

**1863-1867**

*transcribed and annotated by  
Connie LaVon Davis  
December 1999*

### *Acknowledgments*

Many people contributed to this project. My grandmother, Edna Workman Davis, showed me the link between my family and the past through her genealogical efforts. My Great Aunt, Alice Davis Gleason, made that link real through personal reminiscences about Sarah Ellis Davis. Sarah Thorson Little, Lorraine McConaghy and Mildred Tanner Andrews taught me exacting genealogical and historical research methods. Rev. Dr. Stephen Yale introduced me to the archives of the Pacific Conference of the Methodist Church in Berkeley, California. Many correspondents assisted by providing information and photographs. Please accept my sincere thanks.

My family has tolerated my obsession with family history, and I hope someday my children or children's children will be glad for it.

A project like this is never done, and the reader will certainly note gaps in the information that only time and further research will fill.

## ***Introduction***

### **Rev. Thomas Oliver Ellis, MD**

Thomas Oliver Ellis' early life was documented by his children and a granddaughter (Georgia Ellis Peugh, 1926) who reported that he was born in Louisiana Territory in 1808. His mother, Bethena Gilliam Ellis, died when he was about two years old and his father married his wife's cousin, Susanna Gilliam. Little is known about T.O.'s childhood, but a family story relates that T.O. "attended Mount Pleasant Academy, professed religion and joined the Methodist Church, for this cause his Father disinherited him and drove him from home." (Peugh, p. 5) (The evangelical churches were not welcomed by Southern families for several reasons. Methodists were generally anti-slavery, encouraged members to limit their associations with unbelievers, and preached a gospel which included damnation and hell, unlike the Anglican roots of the South. (Heyrman p 26)) T.O. began preaching in the Methodist Church when he was 19 years old. (Peugh) In 1830, T.O. married Sarah Babb Gray, a widow with two children, in Cape Girardeau County, Missouri. (Ellis-Gray) Sometime after their marriage, T.O. and Sarah relocated to Washington County, IL, where at least one of T.O. and Sarah's three children was born. (Peugh) This son, William Josiah Ellis, was their only child that lived to adulthood. ("William Josiah Ellis.")

Sarah died in 1836 and T.O. moved to Tennessee with his family, which consisted of T.O.'s stepson, Vincent Reed Burley Gray, and two of T.O. and Sarah's children. In 1837, T.O. married Elizabeth Long (Peugh) and in the following year, the family was living in Tippah County, Mississippi, where Elizabeth and T.O.'s first child, Sarah Jane Ellis, my great-great-grandmother was born (California, Fresno County, Death Registers). Around this time, T.O.

studied medicine under Dr. Dyer.(Peugh) From this time forward, religion and medicine are woven together in T.O.'s life. He became an ordained deacon on 6 Nov 1842 at Holly Springs, Mississippi, and was associated with the Memphis Conference. During their time in Mississippi, T.O. and Elizabeth had four additional children, Thomas Oliver, Jr. in 1840, Malinda Sophia in 1841, Lucinda Agnes in 1843 and Martha Susanna in 1845 ("A Genealogical Record of the Ellis Family). A son from his marriage to Sarah (Babb) Gray, James Baxter Ellis, died in 1840. T.O. completed his medical studies in 1846 (Peugh), became a church elder in 1848, (Death notice TO Ellis) and moved to Upshur County, TX. Rev. T.O. Ellis, M.D. practiced medicine and operated a pharmacy in Upshur County. At the time of the 1850 census, his stepson, V.R.B. Gray, age 18, and a physician named J.B. Ellis (probably T.O.'s half-brother) were living with the family.(Texas, Upshur County.) The family lived in several Texas counties and more children were born. Mary Carolina was born in 1847, Elizabeth Long in 1849, Nancy Sylvania in 1851, Georgia Hindman in 1853, and George Lunsford in 1855. (Peugh)

Court records of Smith County, TX, indicate that in the fall term of 1856, Thomas Ellis (indexed as T.C. Ellis) of Parker County and John McKinley were delinquent on a promissory note to Thomas Hayes in the amount of \$111.42. The debt was incurred in 20 Nov 1854 in Smith County for merchandise "for the benefit of my (T.O. Ellis) family." It was to have been paid by the first of January. One payment of \$20.40 was made in 1855, and three additional payments were made in 1856, including one payment made in \$10.00 of pork. A summons to court was delivered to T.O. Ellis on 31 Jan 1857. (Texas, Upshur County Court) The outcome of the case is not known, but leads to speculation that economic hardship helped push the family west.

On April 7, 1857, the Ellis family (T.O. Ellis, Elizabeth Long Ellis, and ten children) accompanied by son William Josiah Ellis and his wife, Elizabeth Jane Leonard Ellis, and one

year old baby, Thomas Elrod Ellis, began their journey across the plains in a covered wagon to California. They traveled in a large train via the Southern Route. Elizabeth Long Ellis was expecting and gave birth along the route on 12 May 1857 near Mustang Pool in Texas Territory. The child, John Shelton Ellis, died on the 18 July 1857 at Apache Canyon, in Gadsden's Purchase. Eleven days later, Thomas Elrod Ellis died and was buried in the wagon tracks near San Gabriel Mission in Arizona. (Peugh) In November the train arrived at El Monte, Los Angeles County. ("William Josiah Ellis") T.O.'s stepson, V.R.B. Gray, remained in Texas. (see letter, next section)

T.O. Ellis was appointed Presiding Elder of the Los Angeles District of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1858. (Simmons, p. 8) Daughter Sarah Jane Ellis married William Hale Davis in 1858 in El Monte (Davis-Ellis) and a son, Charles Fisher Ellis, was born there in 1859. (Peugh) Ellis was appointed to the Visalia District of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in October of 1859. (Delta, 15 Oct 1859) and was discontinued from the Presiding Elder's post at his own request in 1860. By the time of the 1860 census, the family had settled in Visalia, Tulare County, CA (1860 census) where T.O. continued to be active in the ministry and medicine. (Work-Work) In 1860, William and Sarah Davis, and their son, Thomas Oliver Davis (who died later that year), were living nearby. (California, Tulare 1860 census) William and Sarah moved to Mariposa county sometime around the start of the Civil War. A.O. Miller, T.O.'s son-in-law, had arrived in Visalia in 1858 (Menefee p 747)

### **The Methodist Episcopal Church, South**

The Methodist Church in America began in 1736 with a visit to the colonies by John and Charles Wesley (Discipline, 1992). The church spread slowly at first, but experienced rapid growth after the Revolutionary War, during a period known as The Second Great Awakening

(Norwood, 157). Methodism was spread through the ministry of traveling preachers. These itinerants rode or walked between far-flung families and congregations on the frontier. Any lay person who experienced a calling to the ministry was encouraged to preach, and few received formal education. (Norwood, 134) Early Methodists used camp meetings and revivals to encourage a personal experience of conversion. By the middle of the 19th century, Sunday Schools were formed, church publications grew, and formal training programs for elders began. (Discipline, 1992)

Along with personal conversion, Methodism emphasizes salvation through faith, an orderly Christian life, and forgiveness of personal sins. As an evangelical church, members are charged with convincing non-Methodists of their approach to religion. Conversion experiences were sometimes emotional and demonstrative, and in the early days may have included falling on the floor and sobbing for forgiveness. Public declaration of faith was expected of Methodist Church members and these experiences often occurred at a camp meeting. A Methodist minister described the usefulness of camp meetings: “The heart that has offered incense at the cross, is best prepared to kneel at nature’s shrine.” (Mead, quoted in Norwood p 158)

The church was organized around widening circles of geography. Believers met in small classes, with lay people or local preachers in charge. Deacons were also active at this level. Deacons were ordained into the ministry and could perform the sacraments (baptisms, weddings and funerals) in their local appointment or under the direction of an Elder. (McKay) The classes would meet in homes, share churches or public halls with other denominations, or meet in their own church building. A group of local classes or churches was known as a circuit, and typically consisted of 2-7 churches. A traveling preacher, or itinerant, would ride the circuit, visiting each church in rotation. (McKay) The circuits were grouped into districts, which held District

Conferences. Each District had a Presiding Elder, who supervised the local preachers. District Conferences in a larger geographic area formed an Annual Conference, such as the Pacific Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to which California and Oregon belonged in the 1860's. Elders were ordained into full membership in the Annual Conference and performed the sacraments wherever the need arose. Bishops provided leadership over the pastors in the Annual Conference. Elders were typically active on the local level, and needed to apply to the Annual Conference if they moved to a new conference. At the end of each annual conference, the bishop appointed pastors to local churches. Every four years the church leaders gathered in a national meeting, called a General Conference. (McElhenny) Bishops were consecrated into office at the level of the General Conference.

The Methodist Church was deeply divided over slavery. The church founders were abolitionists, but the question of slavery was neatly sidestepped until 1844, when pro- and anti-slavery factions clashed at the General Conference. The Conference ended with a Plan of Separation, effectively creating the Methodist Episcopal Church (abolitionist) and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The schism reflected another issue, the status and tenure of church leaders, but this issue was overshadowed by slavery. Each entity developed its own governance structure and divided the business of the church to establish separate publishing houses.

The Civil War was particularly difficult on the church in California. The Southern church was entirely cut off from its national offices for most of the war. (Simmons, p. 288, 295) When a Bishop was able to visit in 1864, he was arrested on suspicion of spying for the confederacy. (Fitzgerald, p. 269-note, year is in error; MacVicar, p. 336.) Candidates for the ministry were sparse. (Simmons, p. 314). The California church considered breaking its ties to

the Southern offices in 1863 (MacVicar, p 335 note: Doctor refers to this happening in May 1861)

As an elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Thomas Oliver Ellis probably kept several books with him for his preaching duties. (Yale) The first was a Bible. The King James version was used by ministers at that time. Another was *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*. This small volume, revised every four years, described the structure, teachings, and ceremonies of the church. The book, which could fit in a gentleman's pocket, answered many questions about the conduct of a minister, including the best general method of preaching (to convince, to offer Christ, to invite, to build up) and "Do not usually pray, *extempore*, above eight or ten minutes (at most) without intermission." (page 85, 1858 version) It is also likely that he carried a hymnal, much like the one published by the Methodist Church (not south) in 1849 (Yale) Another set of books he probably had in his home library would be Wesley's sermons. This three volume set served as a reference for preachers of the Methodist Church.

It also likely that he read the Methodist newspapers published in California. One of these was *The Spectator*. (also known as the San Francisco *Christian Advocate*, *Christian Spectator*, *Pacific Methodist*, and *Pacific Methodist Advocate*) The paper reported on a variety of events, including news from church districts, reflections on Christian life, obituaries, advertisements, poetry, and "The Little Spectator," a column for children. *The Pacific Methodist* was the organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. (Yale)

Thomas Oliver Ellis likely agreed with the culture of the ministry which proclaimed temperance, punctuality and avoidance of bankruptcy as key qualities for Methodist preachers (Yale) as will be seen in his correspondence.

Reverend Barden W. Taylor founded an academy in Visalia in 1860, which the Methodist Episcopal Church of the South investigated and approved as part of the Conference in 1861. It was known as the Visalia Seminary. (Simmons p 284) At one time it had 175 students (Hurst, Harry. *The Alta Pioneers*, p. 28). Rev. Thomas Oliver Ellis was the secretary of the seminary school board and superintendent of public schools in 1863 when his correspondence begins.

### **Medicine in the West, 1860-1870**

The 1860's were a time of transition in American medicine, when longstanding beliefs were giving way to a more scientific basis. Practitioners were a diverse lot, with varying degrees of education and training using a variety of theories to guide their practice. The theory of constitutional pathology, based on the ancient Greek tradition of the four humors, attributed diseases to temperament. (Haller, 4-24) Bleeding, blistering and purging were used to rid the body of bad humors and were commonly used techniques up to the early twentieth century. (Haller, 36-49) This so-called heroic medicine was often fatal to the patient and led to disagreements among physicians and the public, encouraging the growth of alternatives, such as homeopathy and eclectic medicine. Unscrupulous physicians preyed on the uneducated public and quackery was rampant. Medical licensure was not required in California until 1878. (Harris p 166) "Cures" were sold by traveling salesman (Duffy, p 109-127) and in the newspapers. Science began to influence medicine to a great degree in the 19th century, with the development of anatomy and physiology. Early work in microbiology began in the 1840's, but the predominant belief regarding infectious diseases was that evil vapors in unhealthy areas caused illness.

The rapid growth of the colonies led to an apprentice system of medical training. Few physicians attended medical colleges until the late 19th century. The first medical college was

established in Philadelphia in 1766, but training at colleges was often brief and haphazard. (Duffy 65, 102) The more likely method of becoming a physician was to serve an apprenticeship with a doctor and to read medical books under the doctor's direction. This training typically lasted from two to five years, and the student typically paid \$100. (Duffy 166) Preacher-physicians were common in the colonies, often utilizing their medical skills to reach potential church members. Ministers were often among the better educated members of the community and it was natural for them to study medicine. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, published *Primitive Physick* in 1747, and the volume was revised and republished through 1829. This may have influenced T.O. Ellis' decision to obtain medical training. Wesley advised against excessive bloodletting and strong medications. The book provided information for the public to care for themselves. Wesley advised people to seek godly physicians. (Duffy 34-) Doctors of the 19th century considered themselves healers of both body and soul. The physician considered it his duty to introduce patients to God's kingdom, and that Christian principles should guide his work. (Haller, p 283) In the mid 1800's, many ministers believed that science revealed the handiwork of God, so it was not unusual for educated men, including ministers, to follow scientific developments closely. (Holifield, p 130)

Accidents and infectious diseases were the major causes of death until the advent of antibiotics. The medical pharmacopoeia in the 1860's consisted primarily of calomel (a mercury-based cathartic), ipecac (to induce vomiting), quinine (used for fevers), arsenic (multiple uses ranging from hair removal to antisepsis), morphine (for pain), camphor (for itching), tartar emetic (containing antimony and used to cause sweating or vomiting), and opium (for pain). (Haller; Novotny and Smith) Huge doses were used, and patients frequently died of

poisoning. (Haller p 70) Few diagnostic instruments were available, but stethoscopes made of wood were available in the 1860's.

Physicians were common and outnumbered clergymen in both Texas and California during T.O. Ellis lifetime. (Haller app b) The profession of medicine was not as highly regarded as it is today, primarily because the educational level and income of most physicians did not exceed their neighbors (Duffy 180). In the 1860's, a medical doctor in a larger settlement, such as Sacramento, charged \$2.50 for office visits when advice or medication were dispensed, raised the charges to \$5.00 to \$10.00 for special examinations and charged \$5.00 for a home visit. Subsequent home visits cost \$3.00, with a \$2.00 surcharge for night visits. Venereal cases cost \$25.00 to \$100.00, payable in advance. (Harris, p. 128). Fees in rural areas were probably less, and payments were frequently made in goods (Winchell) and it wasn't unusual for the doctor to be the last person to be paid by a strapped family. Physicians were also known for quarreling amongst themselves, and public displays of anger (including scathing letters to newspapers and duels) between physicians were not uncommon. (Duffy, Harris)

Surgery grew little until the discovery of anesthesia, which began to be widely used in the mid-19th century, just in time for the Civil War.

### **The Civil War in Southern California**

Southern California was more heavily settled by Southerners than other parts of the state, and when the War Between the States erupted, Democratic (secessionist) sentiment ran high. Union supporters (Republicans) imagined conspiracy everywhere, and soon difficulties erupted among Californians. (Gilbert) Southerners initiated two secret societies to support the Confederate cause, and local citizens were terrified that they would try to take over California. Californians feared an invasion from the south and posted soldiers along the Colorado river.

(Gilbert) Southern men left California in order to join the Confederate army, and attempts were made to prevent their exit. (Doctor) A military draft was in effect, and exemptions were allowed for elected officials, customs officers and clerks, port inspectors, mariners, postal workers, stage drivers and ferry men on postal routes, and arsenal workers. (ERE 20 Sep 1862:2)

In 1860, the editor of the democratic newspaper was shot after he was challenged by the rival editor to a duel. Later Union officials intercepted mail from Visalia citizens indicative of Southern sympathy, so fifty soldiers were sent to Visalia, establishing Camp Babbitt in October of 1862 after letters supporting the South were intercepted by Union officials and a duel between rival newspaper editors resulted in the death of the Democratic editor. (Doctor, Anderson) These military encampments in Southern California were actively taunted by local secessionists, resulting in frequent fights and occasional murders. For a brief time at the start of the war, miners congregated in the foothills and were thought to be forming an army, although it never materialized. Confederate bandits did rob stages in hopes of outfitting an army. (Gilbert) Tulare county officials were primarily democrats and refused to protect the civil rights of the residents of Visalia, which prompted the formation of a Home Guard. (Doctor)

Much of the financing of the Civil War came from California gold, and Confederates sought to stop the supply. Confederate sympathizers planned raids of sailing ships off California waters with the assistance of the Confederate government in Richmond, but they were unsuccessful. (Gilbert)

The press served as the primary vehicle for Southern support in California. Newspapers espoused strong editorial positions, ranging from staunch Union support to “rabid” secessionism. Newspapers which did not support Lincoln’s administration or the war were sometimes erroneously labeled Confederate, and were suppressed along with the more vocal Southern

supporters. One of the strongest Democratic newspapers was the *Visalia Equal Rights Expositor*. (Gilbert) It was founded in August of 1862 when L. P. Hall and S. J. Garrison bought the press belonging to the *Tulare Post*. ERE, 30 Aug 1862) Their inaugural issue stated their position:

In a political sense the *Expositor* will be the unwavering advocate of democratic principles and will labor untiringly for the EQUAL RIGHTS of all the states to the blessings which flow from the common Union, being fully persuaded that it can only be maintained by a strict observance of the articles of agreement between the States, and by rendering equal and exact justice to all the parties to the compact. This equitable principle would give to the slaveholder of the south the same protection and security to his slave property in the territories and states, and on the high seas that is accorded to every other species of property. This, in our judgment, is EQUAL RIGHTS, and any thing intermediate is a miserable falsehood, a delusion, and finds no warrant in common sense or the constitution.(30 Aug 1862:2)

Thomas Oliver Ellis advertised his medical practice in the inaugural issue, and in every issue of the paper's short existence. Samuel Jones Garrison and Lovrick Pierce Hall (nicknamed Long Primer) were well known to the Ellis family, sharing lodge affiliation and school board connections. (ERE 4 Oct 1862, 15 Nov 1862) The *Expositor* held firm to its views that the war was a violation of state's rights and serialized the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 which described this position. In September of 1862, the *Expositor* and other papers like it were banned from the

United States mail. (20 Sep 1862:3) (The Southern ladies of Visalia rallied to support the *Expositor* and raised money to pay for its delivery. (8 Nov 1862:2, 29 Nov 1862:2, 2 Jan 1863:2)

Tempers ran high in Tulare. After a Methodist Episcopal Church, South Camp Meeting, some tents were cut up and the benches were burned. Donations were solicited and a hundred dollars were raised to replace the benches. (ERE two articles, 20 Sep 1862)

T.O.'s activities are reported in its columns, including his election as County Superintendent of Public Schools in September of 1862, and his testimony at the trial of Colonel Thomas Baker, who was tried for treason in November of 1862. It seems that Colonel Baker gave a speech at the Methodist Church which some listeners thought treasonous (or in the *Expositor's* opinion, were ignorant and illiterate men bribed to report it was treasonous--8 Nov 1862:2) and Baker was arrested. Ellis and others testified in his defense. Baker was released after taking an oath of allegiance.

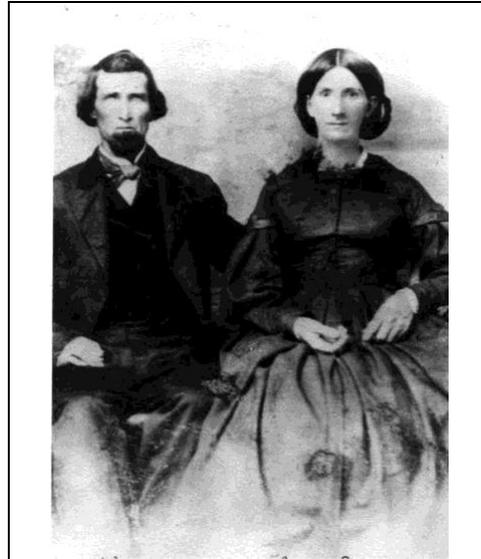
Using Loyalty Oaths to determine the political sentiments of public officials was first suggested by the Sacramento *Bee* in 1861 after a particularly difficult democratic nominating convention in which Edmund Randolph, the democratic candidate for attorney general, called for the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Loyalty oaths were required of litigants, lawyers, teachers and purchasers of certain land after the passage of a bill in April 1863. The Baker incident in Tulare County occurred before the bill was passed and when loyalty oaths were demanded of suspected secessionists by the Union Soldiers stationed at Camp Babbit as retaliation for the constant harassment they received from seceshers and the *Equal Rights Expositor*. (Chandler, Doctor)

The following month, a soldier from Camp Babbitt was shot in an "Affray at the Fashion Saloon." This was followed the arrests of three Visalia men for riding by the Camp "Hurrahing

for Jeff. Davis and Stonewall Jackson” (according to the Republican paper, the *Delta*, reported in Chandler p 136) or whooping at runaway horses (according to the *Expositor*.) The letters begin at this point in time.

### *The Letters*

During this fascinating period, a man of two professions, medicine and the ministry, recorded bits and pieces of his daily life in correspondence with family members. T.O. Ellis wrote his son-in-law and daughter who were living in Hornitos, Mariposa County, at the time (“Jefferson E. Davis”). Hornitos was 125 miles northwest of Visalia. Twelve letters and one undated fragment have survived. Four additional letters written



**Figure 1: William Hale and Sarah Jane (Ellis) Davis, ca. 1859**

between 1863 and 1867 complete the collection. They include one letter from T.O. Ellis to a mining partner, one letter from his son-in-law W.H. Davis to wife Sarah (Ellis) Davis (photo, above), one letter from daughter Mattie to daughter Sophia, and one letter from a step-son, V.R.B. Gray.

The letters probably traveled by stage, such as the line between Visalia and Hornitos run by A.O. Thoms (“Summer Arrangement”). Tulare County had been



**Figure 2: Visalia, Tulare Co., CA ca 1864**

organized in 1852 (Mitchell 26) and the town of Visalia (pictured above in 1864) and a branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South were founded that same year. Nat Wise, founder of Visalia who was reported to be from Texas, lived in El Monte before moving to the Tulare Valley (Mitchell 32-34). He may have had earlier connections with the Ellis family. Visalia was primarily an agricultural community predominated by cattle and sheep ranching. It was along the main route between Los Angeles and Stockton and in close proximity to the southern mines, so several establishments which catered to miners were located there (Menefee and Dodge 34). The 1860s were boomtime in Visalia (Mitchell 146-149).

The letters were found in a trunk in Sarah (Ellis) Davis' home after her death in 1930 (Gleason). I have chosen to preserve the original spelling and punctuation in the transcriptions of the letters, and have provided explanatory information in square brackets in the body of the letters only when absolutely necessary. Illegible or missing text is indicated by an underline. Introductions and conclusions accompany each letter. I have provided the complete text of Bible verses from the King James version first published in 1611 (*Holy Bible*) in the footnotes as well as additional information. I suggest that the letters be read in their entirety first to provide a better picture of these few years in the life of the Rev. Thomas Oliver Ellis, MD.

**19 Jan 1863**

Visalia Jan 19th A.D. 1863.

My Dear Son & Daughter,

Your favors, by Letters, have been duly received & highly appreciated. In the first place, I take pleasure in acknowledging the reception of a very handsome present in boots & shoes, 9 pair in all. You will be so good, as to accept the Family gratitude. God Almighty, we trust will graciously reward the Benevolence. Many changes have taken place since I wrote to you. Many have been taken Prisoners at Camp Babbit, as Col. Baker, the two Mr. Fines, Mr. Work, & our two Editors, & all released by taking the Oath of Allegiance, except the Jun. Editor, who, stoutly refused, alleging, he "would not admit, even by implication that he, Garrison, had violated his true Allegiance to the United States". He was turned loose, just so. Who will be the next, I know not.<sup>1</sup> In the next place, I wish to inform you, I am on my feet, in the Ministry, being the Assistant Preacher of Rev. Brother Sim on this & King's River Circuit. I did not force the door open, but the Church invited, by her P.E. [Presiding Elder] & I accepted the invitation, because, that was the purpose I came to Cal. I am not only on my feet, but expect to be on the wing at Annual Conference, if "The Lord will." I have now some very bad news to tell you. Rev B.W. Taylor, at his own request, was charged of immoral Conduct & broken vows; &, before a Committee of Local Preachers, T.O. Ellis Sen., Revs. M.S. Merrill & Joel Hedgpeth, & was found guilty, & suspended from all Ministerial functions until the ensuing Quarterly Conference of this Circuit.<sup>2</sup> It was to me a painful trial, but, the cause of God required me to act as I did, by force of Testimony, not to be disregarded. It is suspicioned he intends to leave our Church & join the Cumberland Presbeterians, as he has already invited Rev. Mr. Gilliam, of that church to Preach at the Academy next Sabbath, to conflict with the Methodists, & it is thought, to take unjust advantage of our Legal proceedings, to deter us, or to build up a Church by our misfortunes.<sup>3</sup> Time, the great Expounder of events, will declare. I have always defended him to the utmost of my ability, & oftentimes, the Church & the world think, when I

---

<sup>1</sup> The prisoners were Colonel Thomas Baker, David and Smith Fine, Pleasant Lewis Work, Lovrick Pierce Hall and Samuel Jones Garrison. The two Mr. Fines and Mr. Work spent 18 days in prison, including Christmas, before taking the Oath of Allegiance. Jones and Garrison were only detained for two days (Chandler Press 136, "More Arbitrary Arrests," "My Arrest and Release").

<sup>2</sup> Taylor was a notorious Democrat, having offended the town's newspaper editors in 1860 ("Rev. B.W. Taylor"), publicly complained about rumors regarding his school ("The Rev. B.W. Taylor..."), and caused an uproar in church over politics ("Disgraceful Scene in Church"). He had difficulty with the MEC,S before. He was examined by the Pacific Conference at their Annual meeting in 1860 and was discontinued from his post (Minutes 1860, 7).

<sup>3</sup> The legal difficulty of the church that T.O. Ellis refers to is probably the arrest of Colonel Baker for treason following his speech at the Methodist Church, South (see page 12).

ought not. Even now I feel for him, & weep over him but cannot follow him. I dare not! at the risk of my life. Brother Taylor has a few friends left, & those few are trying to make capital for him, & against the Committee & Parson Sim. How far they will, or can succeed, I know not. They are specially down on me. I have two friends to their one I think, but, above all, God is my Friend. Bro. Taylor took the benefit of the Insolvent Oath to prevent paying his honest debts, as the Committee think, & you know how the Methodist Church South, opposes all dishonest Insolvences. There were two charges, & eleven Specifications preferred. Both charges, seven specifications, I believe, were sustained. I hope God will bless us. Brother Sim is very popular, & a Splendid Divine. He excels any man of his age I ever heard.<sup>4</sup> Thomas O. is well of the Mumps. The family are well & send you a thousand & one good wishes, & all, long to see you. Richard Watson is good & Smart, & sometimes hooks Charley's Boots & Struts as large as life. Both say their Prayers, night & morning. The family entreat you to come down as early as you can with convenience. Do not forget us. our love to you & Jane, & specially to Wm. T. Davis. God bless him. Our regards to Capt. Hunter & Bell. Sister Johnson & Frances & Huldah are well as common, just now. Mr. Merrill has fifty Schollars & I assist him when not engaged in Practice or Preaching. His regards to all of you. I am ever your dear Father, in behalf of the whole Family

[To] W.H. Davis

& Wife & Son

[Hornitos, Mariposa Co., CA]

P.S. come & eat honey with us, your Ma says & also bring Jane once a year to see us, as you promised.

T.O.E. Sr.

T.O. Ellis Sr.

Visalia

Cal.

Several trying events are recorded in the above letter. Associates of the Ellis family were arrested for treason, a fellow minister was found lacking, and members of the family were ill.

The case involving the Rev. Taylor is an interesting one. The *Discipline* of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, clearly describes the method of dealing with

---

<sup>4</sup> George Sim was born in England in 1828 and began preaching in the Pacific Conference in 1859 (Loofbourow 213). Fitzgerald tells an amusing story in which "Buffalo Jones," an excitable Methodist complained vigorously about the lack of fire in the preachers at camp meeting. Jones proclaimed that, "You, Brother Sim, do preach a little gospel--in your basket there is *one little nubbin!*" (221-226).

preachers who are reported to be guilty of improper tempers, words, or actions. The first offense is dealt with by the preacher in charge of the location. For a second offense, witnesses are called and a trial is held at the next Quarterly Conference. A secretary is appointed and testimony is heard. The preacher is allowed to appeal to the Annual Conference (MEC,S 138-140). Taylor appealed the case described here to the annual conference in 1863, but the investigating committee reaffirmed the decision of the Visalia Conference (Minutes 1863) and he was expelled (Loofbourow 214). The records of the event are unclear as to the difficulty, but preachers were clearly expected to remain free of debt (Yale interview). Taylor published notices declaring insolvency in the *Equal Rights Expositor* (“Insolvent Notice”). It is interesting to note that Ellis had experienced his own difficulties with debts in Texas (“Hayes vs. T.O. Ellis & J.N. McKinley;” “F. J. Ham vs. T.O. Ellis and G.L. Ellis”).

An additional factor hinted at by T.O. Ellis is the rivalry between denominations. The Cumberland Presbyterians believed in predestination, that God knew all future events and had foreknowledge of who were true believers in Christ. Methodists believed in salvation by faith in Christ alone. The Cumberland Presbyterians had few ministers in California at this time (McDonnold 45) and favored a more educated clergy (Heyrman 83). The Rev. Gilliam did become established in the community (Merritt) and a Presbyterian Church was founded in Visalia in 1866 (Menefee and Dodge 156).

In March of 1863, the secessionist *Expositor* finally crossed the line with an editorial that so inflamed the Union soldiers that they felt compelled to act. The editorial described the difficulty that Massachusetts was having filling its quota of soldiers and

expressed alarm that local soldiers prided themselves in being called “California Cossaks.” The editorial read, in part:

The Cossaks have always lived in tribes subordinate to some despotic ruler, roving in nomadic hordes, violating every rule of civilization. Kidnaping children is mentioned as one of their innocent pastimes. As soldiers, they are ever ready to enlist under the standard of any commander who will furnish pay, and place no restraint upon the gratification of their passion for “loot,” which signifies plunder. (2)

Samuel Garrison was laying the type for the following week’s issue on the evening of the fifth of March when soldiers mobbed the newspaper office and destroyed the press (“Secession Sheet Mobbed,” “On Thursday Evening Last...,” Chandler Press, 137-138). Apparently Garrison and Hall left Tulare County after the destruction of the *Expositor*. According to one source, friends of Hall and Garrison from Mariposa county gathered to “clean up” Camp Babbit, but were convinced by the locals that they should disband (Menefee and Dodge 33). Hall eventually spent nearly two months in Alcatraz prison, which had been founded for traitors during the Civil War (Chandler Press 403-409). Garrison continued to be a strong supporter of secession and states’ rights to self-determination, later publishing the Democratic *Fresno Times*. Garrison and Hall tried for many years to be compensated for their loss, and a bill which would have paid them for the destroyed equipment was passed in 1868, but vetoed by the Governor (Menefee and Dodge 33). Garrison appears in other Ellis letters after 1866.

**14 Jun 1863**

1863

Visalia California June 14th \_\_\_\_\_

William Hale Davis,  
and Sarah Jane Davis

Three times I have taken the pen, & three times let it fall....you judge the reason. How can I tell the news that rives our hearts! O My Jane, your Brother Thomas Oliver Ellis is no more! O My Son! why did you not come down when I wrote to you? O My Son! William! Your Brother T.O. Ellis Jr is dead! Oh fatal word! Why did I write it. O! that Truth would allow me to recall it. But stubborn Truth--the Bible, will allow me to say Thomas Oliver Ellis has Departed this life & is gone to Endless Life -- to Abraham's Bosom--the Land of the free, & the Home of the Brave. yes--yes, it is too true. He was confined to his Bed Monday June 1st, the horse he was riding on Friday before, May 29, stumbled with him badly, & strained, or tore the old seam, or cicatrix [scar tissue] where he Bled two or three times before--once in Losangeles, once holding Hamby, once jumping the Ditch, & then, May the 29/63, & took his Bed Monday evening, & took Medicine. He was very nervous. Tuesday June 2nd he told me very calmly he should die. I saw nothing to justify such a conclusion, until, June the 11th about Sunset. He was mending several days. I called in Drs. Russel & Riley to see if I, in sympathy had overlooked any thing of importance to him. They approved my course. About the fourth day, Thursday he got worse, next day or two was convalescent for several days & thought to be safe, but, still said he would die. On Thursday 11th at Sunset he got over the nightglass & could not have an evacuation -- turned sick, was put to bed & in ten minutes was swelled so with blood & wind, as, almost fit to burst open.<sup>5</sup> You never saw the like! The two two Drs. mentioned & I took hold again & stopped the Bleeding, but, Oh My soul, we could not move his Bowels any more to do any good. Friday the 12th was an unlucky day, a day of trial, pain & alarm. Saturday Morning, Oh wretched, fatal day, revealed the dreadful secret. Miss Martha Blair was sent for. He wanted to see his Parents, through the ordeal, we are passing through. He wished to fill his engagements. Friends called in -- he said Pa Keep the Room empty except my nurses, keep down noise -- I did so. About One Oclock, Saturday June 13th 1863, he had just taken some cooling medicine from

---

<sup>5</sup> The description of his injury, and the course of his illness lead to the conclusion that Thomas Oliver Ellis, Jr. died of a bowel obstruction, possibly from a complication of a hernia and/or former injury. His course fits the description given for a bowel obstruction in DaCosta, *Medical Diagnosis*, 1864 (421-428). The treatments tried likely included the administration of laxatives and a medication for fever, most likely quinine (Whorton; Groh 11, 296).

me, also a little water -- "Now Pa" says he "Invite them in, hurry. I want to tell them good-Bye.

He kissed & blessed his Pa,- his Ma, Sophia, Agnes, Martha, Mary, Lizzie, Nannie, Hindman, George, Charley, & Richard Watson. He said "Lord God bless Pa & Ma, O! bless and save my sisters & brothers Lord bless me & take me to Heaven. I want you all to Meet me in Heaven -- tell Martha Blair<sup>6</sup> to Remember me & meet me in Heaven" I then said to him, 'My Son say "Lord Jesus receive My Spirit you recollect these are the dying words of St Stephen, the 1st Martyr--My Beloved Son, said "Lord Jesus receive my spirit"<sup>7</sup> & then fell to Praying & actually left Praying until we could not understand him, & in two minutes his spirit took its flight beyond the trials & chances of life!

At 3 P.M. Miss Martha Blair & her Father arrived--just two hours too late. She took it hard. On Sunday at 10 A.M. The Independent Order of Good Templars convened--Brother Sim was sent for, he had seen my Son a few hours before his Journey to the skies, he attended to a part of the Methodist Burial services at the House of your Father, the Templars being present. It was a moving, heart rending time. All the family had carriages prepared, & all went with the citizens to finish the Services at the Grave near your Dear little Thomas Oliver -- two Thomas Oliver's now sleep together, & one, your Father mourns their loss.<sup>8</sup> Our loss is given to them. The largest company ever seen in this Valley attended the Independent Order of Good Templars & Methodist Church South<sup>9</sup> Buried him together -- both participated & returned home amidst the sobs & cries of Father, Mother, Sisters & Brothers. O that you could have been present. Every thing of his we see, pants, shoes, &c, &c grieves us. T.O. Jr. was just rising to a virtuous, manly dignity of Character & making friends very fast, &, now he is gone! Oh that word gone. O my children how I weep & write--how can I help it? Monday Morning June 15th we are now preparing Breakfast & making ready for Prayers. I shall spend my days in Prayers & let go of old Earth. We are looking for you, &, you now may be on the road. We put off the Funeral Sermon until you can get here. The 3d Sunday in July. Josiah will be written to this day. [The letter apparently ends here.]

---

<sup>6</sup> Martha Blair was a schoolmate of the older Ellis sisters ("Visalia Select Seminary").

<sup>7</sup> Acts 7:59, "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Oliver Davis and Thomas Oliver Ellis are both buried in the Visalia Cemetery at the corner of West Goshen and North Giddings (*Tulare County Cemetery Index*).

<sup>9</sup> T.O. Ellis Jr. was a member in good standing of the Independent Order of Good Templars, Visalia Lodge No. 48. To mark his passing, members wore badges of mourning for 20 days ("Death Notice"). The Templars was a Temperance Society, encouraging its members to refrain from alcoholic beverages. It was unique because it had both male and female members. Temperance fraternities became popular in the mid 19th century. The I.O.G.T predated the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which was founded in 1874 ("Women's Christian Temperance Union").

T.O. Ellis' two callings are captured in this letter. He described the medical situation in detail, and also his concern that he, "in sympathy" may have overlooked some crucial diagnostic clue or made an error in treatment. This prompted him to have two colleagues review the case. When medicine failed, religion provided solace, and he urged his son to recite verses from the Bible as he died.

The funeral was delayed until July, and apparently William and Sarah Davis made the trip from Mariposa county, as mention is made of "your Tulare trip" in the following letter. The obituary of T.O. Ellis, Jr. appears to the right.

**DIED.**

On the 13th inst., at the residence of T. O. Ellis, Sr., THOMAS O. ELLIS, JR., aged 22 years. The funeral services were attended by a large and deeply interested assembly, and were conducted under the auspices of the Independent Order of Good Templars, of which order the deceased was a respected member. A funeral sermon will be preached by Rev. M. Simm, at the Brick Church, on Sunday 19th day of July.

At a called meeting of Visalia Lodge, No. 48, I. O. of G. T. held on Sunday the 14th inst., for the purpose of attending the burial services of THOMAS O. ELLIS, JR., The following preamble and Resolutions were unanimously passed to-wit:

WHEREAS, The Heavenly Father, in infinite wisdom, has removed from us our young, manly, and beloved Brother, THOMAS O. ELLIS, JR., W. S. of this Lodge, who has been suddenly called to "come up higher."

Therefore, *Resolved*, That we bow to this afflictive providence in full confidence, that it is "ordered in wisdom and in love," and feel that although

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his works in vain,  
God is his own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

*Resolved*, That we cannot see the reason why the young, the hopeful, and the happy, are taken away, our faith assures us, that "it is well," and while we mourn our loss, we are confident that to our Brother "it is great gain."

*Resolved*, That in the deceased we ever found a dutiful son, a kind, considerate Brother, a good citizen, and an earnest worker for reform.

*Resolved*, That we mourn with the bereaved relatives, in their sorrow, and tender to them our hearty condolence in their irreparable loss.

*Resolved*, That in memory of our Brother, the members of this Lodge will wear the usual badge of mourning for twenty days from this date.

*Resolved*, That a copy of these Resolutions be presented to the family of deceased, and also published in the VISALIA DELTA and Temperance Journal.

By order of the Lodge,  
H. W. BRIGGS, W. C. *pro tem.*  
Attest: JOSEPH H. THOMAS, W. S. *pro tem.*

**Figure 3: Obituary,  
Thomas O. Ellis, Jr.  
Visalia Delta 18 Jun**

**7 Aug 1863**

San Luis Obispo, Cal. Aug. 7/63.

\_\_\_\_W.H.Davis Esq,

My dear son, I wrote Sophia a long Letter yesterday, & to day, I wish to talk to you in person. The 3d of Aug. I wrote you & Jane from this place. This makes my second. My Letters to you & Wife, & Sophia will give you the particulars of our Journey to San Luis Obispo. I need not repeat them. We are all well, except, Geo. L. Ellis, who is slowly mending, but cannot walk yet without help. W.J. [William Josiah] Ellis's family are well. Josiah has a pretty home, & the Sacket place I like still better. It lies East of, & Joining this, & contains 160 Acres, 30 in cultivation, house & 3 rooms neatly papered. I am not able to buy it without help. I believe it would be a safe investment, & I would buy it, if I were certain you & Miller would settle here. I would not be afraid of losing on it if I should wish to leav. I can stay on it as long as I wish grati. I am very awkwardly situated, not knowing what to do. My interest is where you

live, but, really, I don't know that, my interest is worth any thing in the mines. I wrote to you to be in readiness to come for me at the proper signal, but I dread to leave W.J. here, for, there is no doubt a well laid, secret Plot is laid against his life, &, if I leave him they will get him. My presence makes, at least, a stand off. They know me, &, the company I keep, &, the weight I carry. I fear as it is, they will waylay him, but, there is know danger openly. There is considerable difference between a brave man & a coward. I am making the impression, I will settle here on his account, still the idea of doing so is horrifying unless we could have, at least, one Religious society, &, besides have my Children with me.<sup>10</sup> The 10th Inst. [Instant: refers to the current month] we expect to move, &, positively every thing is to buy & nothing to buy with. Nearly the last red is gone. I need Bread, Meat, a stove, &, almost every thing Josiah has been at immense expense on my account, &, I cannot think of calling on him. Be so good as to write, frankly, all of your mind about every thing & tell me about my Claims, their real situation, their probable worth, whether Recorded, or are they jumped.<sup>11</sup> How are your Claims progressing? which is estimated the highest. I heard from Mattie, that, it was reported, one of your Claims was worth twenty or thirty thousand dollars. Is it so? Have you got over your Sacrifice occasioned by your Tulare trip?

How are you getting along temporally, &, above all, is it well with you Spiritually? Let us live by the Bible. Let us make a good Out-fit for the Heavenly journey! How are Capt. Hunter<sup>12</sup> & Mr. Crockett<sup>13</sup> getting along? How is Jane, &, my two Boys? [William Taylor Davis and Jefferson Ellis Davis] How is Miss M.S. [Malinda Sophia] pleased. What does she & Jane think about my visit, &, about my settling. Has Frank King returned, &, is he well? I have not heard of Mr. G. [probably Samuel J. Garrison] since I left. Is Bell with you? Tell her to be smart & take good advice & be happy. Should I not move what time will Sophia & Jane & you visit us? And should I conclude to move up where you live, still, you all are expected on a visit.

No backing out my Son. A man reported at \$2000. certainly can come. Tell us all about every thing. Write munchos. My Family & W.J. [William Josiah] join in love & compliments to you & yours, Sophia & Bell, & Capt. W. [Watts]<sup>14</sup> & Mr. Crockett.

---

<sup>10</sup> William Josiah Ellis was subject to the military draft ("Who Escape Drafting").

<sup>11</sup> Between 1848 and 1866, there were no laws governing mining in California, so technically everyone was a trespasser (Holliday 400). Miners in each area would agree on codes which typically described the size of claims, marking to show ownership, definition of abandonment, and how difficulties would be resolved (Watkins 96).

<sup>12</sup> Capt. E. Hunter was a fellow Southerner and Democrat (Menefee and Dodge 29).

<sup>13</sup> See letter from T.O. Ellis to William Crockett, 30 Aug 1863.

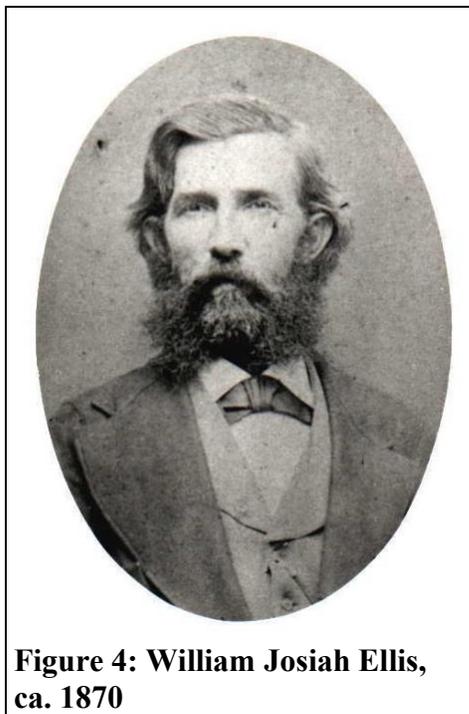
<sup>14</sup> Captain Charles B. Watts was a neighbor and partner of W.H. Davis (California, Fresno Co. 1870, Davis).

[To] Wm. H. Davis Esq  
[Hornitos, Mariposa Co., CA]

Your Father  
T.O. Ellis Sr.

By August of 1863, T.O. Ellis relocated his family to San Luis Obispo County. His eldest son, William Josiah Ellis (below), apparently settled there in 1859 (“William Josiah Ellis”). San Luis Obispo was the site of one of the original California ranchos. Large cattle ranches, including some dairy farms, dominated the economy. A wharf was constructed at the port of San Luis in 1855. San Luis Obispo was regarded as a “sleepy backwater” between 1860 and the arrival of the railroads in the 1880’s (Krieger 66).

The proposed road to San Luis Obispo was described in the 18 Feb 1860 edition of the *Visalia Delta*. San Luis Obispo is 100 miles southwest of Visalia, and at that time



the road was passable only to wagons with light loads. Since the California Steamboat Navigation Company regularly served the wharf, efforts were being made to establish a road which could handle heavy wagons and trade (“The Road to San Luis Obispo”). The sheepmen of Tulare County advocated for the road and it was completed in 1862 (Mitchell 92). Ellis and family likely traveled on this new road.

California was hit by drought from 1862 to

1865. The Visalia papers published news of hardships in the coast counties (“In the Coast Counties”). It is estimated that over 300,000 cattle and 100,000 sheep were destroyed in the drought years, and visitors to San Luis Obispo remarked that “the sun-

bleached bones of dead cattle were strewn over every hill and gully” (Kreiger 66). Land may have been easy to come by in San Luis Obispo due to the drought. The move created some financial hardships, and T.O. Ellis apparently held mining claims near William Hale Davis which he hoped would prove fruitful.

This letter suggests that the extended family of T.O. Ellis was apparently considering settling together in San Luis Obispo County. Ellis refers to William Davis moving to San Luis Obispo along with another Ellis son-in-law, A.O. Miller. The elder Ellis daughters were living with their married sisters. Sophia was staying with Sarah and William and Martha was staying with Lucinda Agnes and A.O. Miller. The chain migration was never complete. Only T.O. and family followed Josiah to the coast.

The Civil War remained a concern, and efforts were made to keep the family intact. Since the Ellis family were southerners and Democrats, William Josiah did not want to serve as a Union soldier. T.O. Ellis may have been relying on his status as a minister to prevent his arrest.

### **21 Aug 1863**

San Luis Obispo, Cal, Aug. 21/63  
 W.H. Davis, family,  
 & Miss M.S. Ellis,

Your Family Letter of the 13th Inst. was received by last night's mail, & ere you receive this, your hearts will be deeply pained at the information I sent you the 13th or 14th of this Month, the Death of our dear Son, George Lunsford Ellis, your Sweet & beloved Brother, who, departed this life Friday 12 oclock, Aug. 14th 1863, & Buried the 15th of Aug. his Father officiating at the grave.<sup>15</sup> All was done that I could do to prolong his blessed life. He is, I trust, at rest, "where the wicked cease to

---

<sup>15</sup> As T.O. had written in the previous letter, there was no church in San Luis Obispo, so he was obliged to perform the funeral himself. The nature of George's illness is difficult to determine, although the letter dated 7 August mentions his illness.

trouble, & the weary are at rest."<sup>16</sup> The 18th Inst., Tuesday morning we moved to our new Home, 400 yds. due East of W.J. Ellis, &, in sight of your Brother's grave, in the plot of ground laid off for an American Grave yard. We have a pretty place & we shall purchase it at \$320. There are 160 Acres, 30 Acres in good cultivation, a House with 3 rooms, besides the two lumber rooms. Two of the rooms neatly papered.

The house is shingle roofed, locks & keys &c. We have 3 beds put up, two in the Ladies room & one in the Sitting room. I have written to Mr. Briggs<sup>17</sup> to forward my Books, via Stockton to San Luis Obispo. The wind is high here, but, it has not injured any of us yet. I am broken out all over with something like heat, but, it has not made me sick. I suppose the Tulare diseases are working out of me. We feel lonesome & somewhat desolate, occasioned by the loss of two Sons & the absence of four daughters. We are glad to hear you are all well pleased & have bright prospects ahead. I hope your most sanguine expectations will be realized. The 1st & greatest of all things is, to "Lay up treasures" on high "where moth & rust do not corrupt, &, where thieves do not break through & steal."<sup>18</sup> O! let us ever be mindful of "the one thing needful" &, "choose that good part that shall not be taken away from us."<sup>19</sup> The great office of men & women on Earth is to "Prepare to meet God"<sup>20</sup> by "doing justly, loving Mercy, & walking humbly before God."<sup>21</sup> "Let us war a good ware-fare, holding Faith & a good conscience, which, some having put away concerning Faith, have made ship-wreck, of whom is Hymeneas & Alexander."<sup>22</sup> You all love to read my Letters, but, but do you love your Heavenly Father's Letters of Inspired Wisdom? My letters are not without fault, but his Writings are perfect, absolutely perfect! "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye have Eternal life,"<sup>23</sup> & hence, "are profitable for

<sup>16</sup> Job 3:17, "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest."

<sup>17</sup> H. W. Briggs was member of the I.O.G.T., and later was a register and receiver at the Visalia Land office (Langley 248). Stockton had served as the main freight route to Visalia for many years since the San Joaquin river was navigable up to Fresno City (Mitchell 34, 36, 92).

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 6:19-21, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

<sup>19</sup> Luke 10:42, "But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

<sup>20</sup> Amos 4:12, "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

<sup>21</sup> Micah 6:8, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

<sup>22</sup> I Timothy 2:18-20, "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." Hymenaeus is the god of marriage personified. (Barnhart 2095).

<sup>23</sup> John 5:39, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

Doctrine for reproof, for correction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."<sup>24</sup> W.J. Ellis' wife & family supped with us last night & were very solicitous I should remember them to you all in much love & esteem. They are all well. Your Ma is lying down on my left watching me write to her loved ones. Mary & Lizzie are washing. Nannie is out with Charley & Richard, & Georgia Hindman is on a visit to Bud Jo's. All are well. We received two Letters from A.O. & Agnes & Mattie last night, & they inform me Mattie is sick with Chills & Fevers, but, not dangerously ill. They gave me the particulars of the late fight in Visalia, of which you no doubt, have heard. A.O. will be in your neighborhood, with all the family, by the time this reaches you. We are all glad to hear of his intended move up there & Pray for his success, as well as the rest of you. Regards to Croquette & Capt. Hunter. Love & compliments to you all, individually, & collectively. I feel quite an interest in my Mining claims. Tell me about T.O. Jr.'s & the one Mr. Crockett took up for me. You say I have 3 in the copper Mines. Are the others jumped, or, lost, or dropped?

God be with & bless you all, evermore! Your Dear Father  
 [to] W.H. Davis Esq. T.O. Ellis Sr.  
 Wife, Sophia & E. Ellis, your Ma  
 the Babes.

[Hornitos, Mariposa Co., CA]  
 P.S. I pledge myself to answer all your Letters. T.O.E.Sr.  
 [To] W.H.D. &c. &c.

T.O. and Elizabeth Ellis experienced the death of two sons in two months in 1863. Ellis used scripture to comfort his family during this difficult time, quoting multiple Bible verses from both Old and New Testaments.

As the family settled in their new home, the troubles the Civil War brought to Tulare County were still on their mind. The "late fight in Visalia" that Ellis referred to probably was an incident involving James Wells. On August 7, 1863, Wells, an upcoming young merchant, killed an enlisted man after an argument with two soldiers

---

<sup>24</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

from Camp Babbitt. The newspaper describes an old west shoot out, with threats preceding a gun battle in the main streets of town, using building pillars for shelter, riding off on a horse, and hiding out in the swamps behind town. Other by-standers apparently joined in (“Assassination of Another Soldier;” Doctor 3; Menefee and Dodge 31-32). Wells fled to Mexico, and his home was burned by soldiers (Doctor 3). The local newspaper editor wrote, “We hope no Union man has been guilty of conduct worthy of Jeff Davis’ guerrillas” (“On Friday Night” p. 3 col 1). Wells’ family obtained a change of venue to Merced county and Wells was tried there and acquitted (Menefee and Dodge 32).

T.O. mentioned the Tulare diseases working out of him. It was commonly believed that illnesses were caused by unhealthy soil (Duffy 104) and Ellis hoped that the high winds in San Luis Obispo would not harm the family.

Responses to letters often passed each other on the way, causing misunderstandings and renewal of grief, as can be seen in the following letter.

### **28 Aug 1863**

San Luis Obispo, Cal. Aug 28' 63  
W. H. Davis, Esq.

Your family letter of the 21st in answer to mine of the 12th, giving an account of Little George's dangerous sickness, was received yesterday evening, with one from Sophia on the same leaf. I read it in Town, to myself, concealing my tears & emotions the best I could till I left for home & on the road, nature spoke, unrestrained. When I reached home, I read it to your Mother and sisters. Your Ma's tears flowed like rain-drops from the clouds, mingled with those of your earthly Sire. It was then sent to W. [J]. Ellis & wife, who also read it. And now with a heaving Bosom & moistened eyes I answer it, thanking God, for his mercy to us all, in Sad, heart-rending afflictions & earthly separations. I am still enabled to say “The Lord gave, & the Lord hath taken away. blessed be the name of of the Lord. “It was good for me to be afflicted. I will not

Judge the Lord by feeble sense,  
 But trust him for his Grace,  
 Behind a frowning Providence,  
 He hides a smiling face!<sup>25</sup>

So it has been. I think we are more, & still more like our Blessed Lord, who, on Earth was "meek & lowly in heart."<sup>26</sup> I devoutly Pray, & fondly hope, we all may "live a quiet & peaceable life, in all godliness & honesty; for this is good & well pleasing in the sight of God, our Savior, who will have all men to be saved, & to come unto the knowledge of truth." But virtue must be cultivated, to the extent of our whole ability. "They that are Christ's \_\_\_ is crucify the affections & lusts." Like your mining claims, Religion, must be seen to, & embraced. Now ardently does the miner prospect, watching with the closest attention the precious metal, & when he sees it, What Sincere pleasure does it afford him! O! then let us prospect for the real Gold! "Search the scriptures, in them you. Have Eternal Life, & they are which testify of me,"<sup>27</sup> says the blessed Savior. There never has been sufficient importance attached to the Bible! But I will not weary you with my pious reflections, through, it is my greatest pleasure to talk, & read, & write about, our holy Religion.

The family with W. J. Ellis' are all well, & quietly, & pleasantly situated in our new home. We are better pleased & reconciled every week we remain here. You with me "to explain the reason of my "fears in going" to "the Sacket house" where we now live. It was on account, I suppose, of little George's dangerous sickness, of, it might have been a "fear we could not pay for the place without help. I was in so much anguish, I do not recollect the half I said. I shall purchase the place, I expect & as it contains 160 Acres, there will be enough for you, & Oscar, & Me. I & your Ma do not wish you, at so critical a time of your business, to derange your mining interests on our account, as bad as we may wish to see you all here. The best way you can befriend us, is to attend to yours & our Claims. I have a strong impression, if you do so, we shall yet enjoy, at least, the necessaries of life. This you can do, & yet be truly Pious. We do not expect you to send Sophia down here, as much as we want to see her, at this time, & not until you are able. We pray, however, that it will not be long until you are all here. I am satisfied, Sarah Jane will be better pleased, than when here before. Her Parents, Brothers &

---

<sup>25</sup> Ellis paraphrased and quoted the fourth stanza of the hymn, "Light Shining Out of Darkness":  
 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
 But trust him for his grace;  
 Behind a frowning providence  
 He hides a smiling face (MEC 445)

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 11:29, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

<sup>27</sup> John 5:39, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

Sisters will be here, & we can unite & improve Society, if we will try. W. J. & Wife, & Mary Lizzy, Nancy, Hindman, Charley & Richard, your Ma, & Pa send you Christian salutations & love.

Hoping peace on Earth & good will to man, may shortly be universal, & hoping Downey will be Elected, I subscribe myself your affectionate Father as ever

T. O. Ellis, Sr  
E. Ellis

[To] W. H. Davis Esq  
& Wife & Sophia  
[Hornitos, Mariposa Co., CA]

P.S. Little Sammy is a little sick.  
My Breaking out is better.  
The country is Healthy, &  
Religion desirable.

Reuniting the family and the war in the East continued to be concerns. T.O. expressed a desire to improve society, which is closely tied to his claim in the first letter (19 Jan 1863) that he came to California to preach the gospel. Ministers and families were two primary means to tame the wild California lifestyle that was established with the gold rush (Maffly-Kipp 92, Moynihan, Armitage, and Dichamp 15).

T.O. Ellis supported the Democratic candidate for governor, John G. Downey. Downey was elected lieutenant governor in 1859 (Kibby 315) and became governor of California in 1860 after Governor Latham filled the senate post of David Broderick, who was killed in a duel with a Democrat. Downey was a political unknown (Chandler Press, 64-65). His sentiments became clear in 1861 when he denounced Lincoln's use of force to preserve the union. Downey was defeated (Kennedy 77).

It is likely that Ellis served as his family's minister at this time, and parts of this letter resemble a sermon. He drew parallels between the earthly activities of his son-in-

law (prospecting for gold) and the earnest attention he believed should be paid to seeking Christ.

### 30 Aug 1863

San Luis Obispo, Cal. Aug. 30/63

W.H. Davis Esq,

Your short note, in conjunction with Mr. Crocket's, giving an account of receiving the sad intelligence, the Departure of our little George Lunford Ellis, was received last night. Our family are well. W.J. Ellis' little son Samuel is very sick with an inflammatory fever, threatened with inflammation of the brain, but, to day, is better, & I think will soon recover. The rest are well & send you compliments. It is mine, & your Mother's request to you all, that you should not, & ought not, to grieve immoderately. Better "prepare to meet God." "If we believe that Jesus died & rose again, even so, them that Sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him. "This we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that they, which are alive" at the Savior's second coming, "shall not prevent" or go before "the dead" though confined ages in their graves "for the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel & the trump of God: the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive," at that time, "& remain shall be caught up, together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the Air, & so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words! "Sorrow not as others," the heathen & the unbelievers "who have no hope." 1st Thess. 4 chap. 13-18 verses.<sup>28</sup> Tell Sophia her Pa dreamed an extraordinary Dream about her last night. I thought I was at a large Meeting, where very many were engaged in Religious exercises, & all of a sudden, I was marching along with others, & came to a large Room, in which a Love-feast was holding.<sup>29</sup> Before I went in at the door, I heard speaking in the opposite end from me; I knew the voice, & hastened in & behold! Sophia was, or had been giving in an humble, but glowing Christian Experience! As she finished, & before I or she was seated, I spoke right out, 'I am glad Dear Sophia thus to hear you talk about & enjoy the Christian Religion.' I thought I never saw her dressed so plain & coarse, & look so care worn, as though she had had, a great struggle. True, it is a dream, only a dream, but such were my feelings of anxiety for her, that sleep fled from my eyes the most of the night.

<sup>28</sup> T.O. Ellis paraphrased I. Thess. 4:14-18.

<sup>29</sup> A Love-feast is a Methodist meeting consisting of singing and prayer, a short address by the pastor, sharing bread and water, passing the collection plate to benefit the poor, and sharing by attendees. It closed with singing and prayer (MEC,S 113).

May the Great Lord, for Christ's sake help her, & bless her, & give her all the "fullness of the Gospel of God! If Sophia was hungry would she not ask her Pa for bread with the full Belief she would get it. so then, says Christ, "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more! shall your Heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him."<sup>30</sup> O! comforting words, that God for Christ's sake is more willing to bless us, than we are to give Bread to the Children we love! I want you, William to take up the Cross & duty as before. You are raising children, & family Prayers will bless you & wife, & be a lovely example before your precious Babes. Tell Sarah Jane to do all that the Savior requires & let her Prayers unite her with her Fathers, in Christ, to bless us & all our dear connexions, & spread light & Salvation all over the Earth! May the Divine Savior bless you all at Camp-Meeting & else where. We all send you love. T.O. Ellis Sr.

W.H. Davis Esq.

P.S. Little Richard has a very bad Run-round on the fore finger & a few minutes ago, Aug. 31st, 1 o'clock P.M., George tramped on it accidently, & he like to have gone into Spasms. We talked about Sophia last night & said "he would whip the Man that took off Topa."<sup>31</sup> We are all up to day.

[To] W.H.D.

Love to all T.O. Ellis Sr.

[Hornitos, Mariposa Co., CA]

In the preceding letter, T.O. Ellis sought to comfort his family about their recent losses. He also used the opportunity to exhort his daughter and son-in-law to raise their children as Christians by being examples and holding family prayer time. He related a dream with a religious theme he had about his daughter Malinda Sophia. Ellis again described the family illnesses. A grandchild, Samuel Leonard Newton Ellis was seriously ill and his son had an infection around his fingernail. Faith, illness and family are the three themes in Ellis' correspondence. On a lighter note, Ellis related that Richard missed his elder sister, Sophia.

---

<sup>30</sup> Matt. 7:11: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

<sup>31</sup> This may refer to the marriage of Malinda Sophia Ellis to J. C. C. Russel (Calhoun) but I have been unable to locate a marriage record.

### 30 Aug 1863, to William Crockett

San Luis Obispo, Cal. Aug. 30th, A.D. 1863

Wm. H. Crockett Esq., Respected Friend

Your very interesting favor of the 19th Inst. reached me last evening, not having been mailed until the 25th. The news, of health & prosperity in mines, & mining claims, was quite acceptable, & even cheering. You are placing me under great obligations, by your unmerited attention to me, & family interests. I hope so to conduct myself, as to shew myself worthy your regards, & ever feel that gratitude, which, is the result of noble deeds. To present you my thanks and high regards is, but the outburst of an honest Benevolent Mind. Should you continue to assist in Representing my claims, & thereby prevent them from being lost, you will, doubtless, confer on us a favor, that, perhaps, will yield us the necessaries, if not the conveniences of life. The milk of human kindness in this world, is so very rare, that I am accustomed to attach to it great value & importance. My family are well, & pleasantly situated in our new home, for the present. We shall remain here until a door opens to do better. My present home is situated 1200 yds. south of San Luis Obispo, & 9 miles north of the Ocean. The country is pretty & healthy; nothing being deficient \_\_\_ make it happy, but we want of Religious Society. Whenever the whole connexions think & advise us to move up there, & my interest should require it, I shall cheerfully & heartily concur. My son, who lives here, W. J. Ellis Esq, wishes to have, when convenient, a family talk, & if possible, set \_\_\_ in reach of, at least, an occasional visit. This is so reasonable I cannot reject it. I have always wished to move up, but the door was not opened up, & hence, I am here for the present. Should your Business allow you to visit the Warm Springs, or the Pacific Coast, I hope you will do me the honor to call & spend a few days or weeks with me. You probably have heard of another severe family affliction, of ours, in the Departure of an other son, George Lunsford Ellis, Aug 14/63, Aged 8 years, one month & one day. We find a sweet christ in meekness, in the crucified & risen Savior, to submit to the sad Bereavement. Allow me, as a duty, & in token of my high regard, to recommend, & call your attention to, the Christian Religion, that living, paying Mine, which, if a man prospects well & fare will result in untold riches, & honor, & happiness without alloy! Let the Bible be your theme, your great delight by day & night; for it is the only Foundation for correct morals & genuine character. You may already be, what the writer recommends, if so, I congratulate you; if not, come boldly to the Throne of Grace & obtain Mercy--free for all. Yes. Free as the air you breathe & the water you drink! But I will not further trouble you with pious reflections. Hoping you long life, health & happiness in both worlds, I subscribe myself your ardent Friend.

Write often.

T.O. Ellis Sr.  
San Luis Ob.  
Cal.

[To] Wm. H. Crockett Esq.  
Yoleta  
Cal.

Ellis mentioned W. H. Crockett in several letters preceding this one. He was apparently T.O.'s agent, or representative, for his mining claims. Crockett was noted to be a builder and lumber dealer in the 1867 business directory in Mariposa, Mariposa County (Langley 163). It is unclear why Sarah Jane (Ellis) Davis had this letter.

Conditions did not improve in San Luis Obispo, as the following letter illustrates.

**21 Sep 1863**

San Luis Obispo Cal. Sept 21/63.  
W.H. Davis,

Dear son, this is Monday morning, I am sitting up & going about some, but have the headache about half the time. I fear Mrs. E. & I have committed an error by sending for a wagon to you all to move us. This climate does not agree with me but, then I am better & can wait longer, if you are all pressed. I know how you are all situated & dont wish to do wrong. I wrote before when sick\_\_\_\_\_ besides Mrs. E. was scared I will try & take better care of myself or, if need be, go to the warm Springs<sup>32</sup> & stay until you can come conveniently. Besides I dread to leave W.J. Ellis alone. My coming has rolled back the tide, which, was against him, & now if I leave before he can sell, it will rise again. We will sell as soon as possible, but, his selling is a secret here. We dont want to seem to be in a hurry, would have left here long ago had it not been for threats. The families, both, are now up except E.J. Ellis, who, is in a delicate condition. Her dropsical [referring to edema, or fluid accumulation] affection will cease by & by. I need money very much indeed, but do not injure yourselves to get it. W.J. Ellis is hard run, owing to loss of Business for us, & heavy expenses also on our account. I felt it my duty to write this much, as I am a little stronger in Mind & Body. My

---

<sup>32</sup> An advertisement in the 4 May 1861 *Visalia Delta* described the Warm Springs of San Miguel, 31 miles north of San Luis Obispo. The springs were purported to have medicinal qualities ("Messrs. Blackburn and Clark...").

regards to Capt. W. & Mr. C. [Captain Watts and Mr. Crockett] Love to Miller & Agnes & Mattie & Eddie. Remember me & wife & children to Jane, Sophia, Bell & the children. I must leave for the sick room & the mail.

Your Father as ever

[To] W.H. Davis Esq.

T.O.

Ellis Sr.

[Hornitos, Mariposa Co., or Fresno Co., CA]

In this letter Ellis expressed uncertainty about his future. The move to San Luis Obispo was difficult. Illness disrupted family life, and the threat of conscription loomed for William Josiah Ellis. T.O. was so ill that he sent for W.H. Davis to move the family from San Luis Obispo. While T.O. was unable to work, Josiah supported both families. Josiah's wife, Elizabeth Jane, was expecting, and apparently experienced some difficulties with the pregnancy.

The following letter is damaged, including the date. Although 1865 is handwritten on the letter in script other than Ellis' own, the content of the letter indicates it was written earlier, possibly in 1863. Further research on the events described may solve this puzzle.

**26 Nov 186[3]**

San Luis Obispo, Cal Nov 26/6[3]

W. H. & S. J. Davis

My Dear Children, I now have \_\_\_\_\_ thing to write of considerable importance \_\_\_\_\_ Ellis has sold out both places, or rather \_\_\_ out for he only gets one wagon worth \$2\_\_ & \$250 cash & one other house & garden place worth \$ 259, making in all \$750 dollars. The money will about pay his debts & defray his expenses to Los Angeles whither he goes & so you see, I am to be left alone the 2nd time. The place he bought is for immediate sale & now he is rapidly winding up & winding out & gives possession the 30th of this month.

Josiah has resisted all my efforts to go with me to see you all & hold a general talk about settling ourselves. He thinks you all have not

complied with the understanding we had at Visalia, that is to come down here this fall & look at the country & agree on some place to settle ourselves. A. O. especially, he says, promised to come & has not. My dissatisfaction, however, is the foundation of his dissatisfaction. I felt & foresaw the place would not suit me with a family of Daughters,<sup>33</sup> upon whom I place a great value, otherwise, I might \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_lived along, after the style of the \_\_\_\_\_ry, make all you can & keep all you \_\_\_ us. W. J. Things, no doubt, that your \_\_\_\_\_ would not be so anxious to leave \_\_\_be sustained the same relation to her, as the \_\_\_ rest of you. He has been very unhappy ever since his Brother's departure & acts like a man under conviction, for he has suffered immensely in Religion while living without Church Privileges in San Luis. One of the Main Springs, I think, to his sudden sale is to avoid the Draft, but I do not know it as he seldom tells others his private thoughts. I have begged him, & implored him to stand his ground & confirm to the Law of the U. S. & quoted to him the 13th of Romans, "Let every soul be subject to the higher Powers" &c. May God bless & save him. I have suffered not a little distress of mind on his account. I do not wish him, at present, to know I have written anything about my thoughts on the subject, as he might put a wrong construction on it. Really, I write about it in love & tenderness & have shed many tears on the matter. He is my well Beloved Son, whom I love most affectionately but, then, I can see faults in any.\_\_\_\_\_child, & even in myself, over the latter. I often dwell almost to crucifixion, at times. I only lament that you all & your Pa have not been fortunate to get W. J. to live near us, & be more under Religious influences. I hope yet he may change his mind, but the hope is faint. You will have to hurry if you get another letter to him. Write sweetly & softly for my sake & draw him if you can. His & my families are well except little Richard who mends slowly. I am getting very stout of my age & so is your Ma, Mary, Lizzie, Nannie, Hindman, & Charley, Richard only is puny. I have been several times on the point going horse back to see you to hurry things, but fear of Missing the wagon unless I knew which way you would come. The lone cottonwood<sup>34</sup> is doubtless the nearest, a hundred miles nearer, I think than the way you moved from here. Both families join me in regards to you & yours, & A. O, & wife & children & the girls, Sophia & Mattie. I hope the little ones in both families are well. Your Pa

T. O. Ellis,

Sr.

[To] W. H. & S. J. Davis

<sup>33</sup> Ellis must have felt it would be difficult to farm with so many daughters.

<sup>34</sup> The Lone Cottonwood was a station on the Butterfield Stage Route, also known as Packwood Station (Mitchell 38). It is south of Visalia (Ormsby, frontispiece).

"P. S. I read a Letter yesterday from Los Angeles stating that a vigilance committee<sup>35</sup> was formed there to suppress Murder, & robbery & also to punish those who put out a false excitement about Colorado & San Francisco Mines. The Letter was written by Health, Old Man Bigg's son in Law. He has just returned from Colorado Mines, did not stay long, because he aid it did not take long to see all the claims. Where one makes, a hundred spends what they took there. No grass between here & there, but plentiful these nearly the only good thing. Dry washing is the fashion & he was there in the rainy season. He says, he knows nothing about San Francisco Mines, could not go these & all the Men in Colorado Mines are ten times too small to go there, in these heart of the Apache Country, but thinks it is a good Country. In ten days he allowed to go to Kerne River Mines as a preference to any thing he had seen. Eight men are hung in Los Angeles. Three Americans & 5 Californians or Indians.

T.O. Ellis Sr

[To] W. H. & S. J. Davis  
[Hornitos, Mariposa Co., or Fresno Co., CA]

T.O. Ellis was clearly concerned about his son Josiah. The death of T.O. Ellis Jr., the draft, the lack of church fellowship and financial hardship pushed Josiah into moving to Los Angeles. Josiah had imagined the entire family living in San Luis Obispo, and when that failed to happen, he decided to move on, even though it left his father in an awkward situation.

The T.O. Ellis family relocated to Hornitos, where Robert Lee Ellis, the couple's final child, was born on 10 July 1864. Sarah Jane and William Hale Davis had moved to Fresno County sometime in 1863. Hornitos, Mariposa County, was one of the roughest mining towns of the 1850s (Nadeau 114). It served as the hideout of the bandit, Joaquin Murieta, and was the site of anti-Chinese violence (Florin 66-69). By 1864, the town had

---

<sup>35</sup> Vigilance Committees were a carryover from the lawless days of the gold rush (Groh 244). As in Visalia in the stormy years between 1861 and 1863, the citizens would turn first to the civil authorities, and if unable to obtain justice, the military. If the military action was unsatisfactory, the citizens would form their own committees for vigilance (Chandler Press, 449).

settled considerably and was known for Mrs. Marck's French pastries (Florin 68) and Ghirardelli chocolates (Nadeau 114).

**15 Jul 1864**

Hornitos, Cal. July 15/64  
Dear William & Jane,

I hope you arrived at home safely. I heard of you at Loregan's the morning you left. Your Ma & Babe keep well, but I myself & very unwell & have been nervous you know for some ten days. The Girls & Boys are all well except those vaccinated - they have fever & complain very much, but, nothing dangerous, O.K. Take good care of Willie for Jeffie will take care of himself, & let me know how you got home & what is the news. I wish you to take a special interest in Towser as I expect to need him, & do not forget Jule & her colt.

I have just heard that the Soldiers are coming here, but can give you no particulars as I have just heard it through Mrs. Clough. You must make your own comment on this, as you both are of age. I would if I could - that is all I have to say.

I think the time is coming that will try men's souls & may be so, the bodes too. Let us all live right & all will be well with us by & by.

I have declined coming to Mariposa & expect to remain here a few months "if the Lord will." Should I succeed & get a good Practice it will be cause of devout gratitude to God. I will try to keep on the old foundation, if God will help me, it is my only help & hope.

Tell the Girls Mary & Nannie we expect them to come home the next time Mr. McCain goes to Mariposa. If I knew I could be at camp meeting, or you, or Agnes would be there, I should have no objections for them to go. As it is, I should object to them going, as they would have no Protector, & I know how things work under such circumstances. In fact I do not know you will have a camp meeting as Bro. Pendergrast has not informed nor invited me. Your father,

T. O. Ellis

[To] W. H. Davis &  
wife &c.



**Figure 5: Mary Carolina Ellis, ca. 1866**

T.O. Ellis described his desire to set up a medical practice in Hornitos. He also vaccinated his children. The only widely used vaccine at the time was for smallpox.<sup>36</sup>

The family was also now back in an area served by the church and camp meetings occurred nearby. Camp meetings frequently began with an experience meeting at 9:00 AM. New converts and penitents talked about their lives, which the preachers then incorporated into their sermons during the remainder of the meeting (Simmons 238-

240). Ellis may not have been closely connected to the church at this time, as he was uncertain to the schedule for camp meetings. He also expressed concern for his unmarried daughters, Mary and Nannie (Mary is pictured above), directing them to return home with Mr. McCain, and allowing them to attend camp meeting if chaperoned by an older married sibling.

The Ellis family apparently remained in Mariposa county for two years, as is evidenced by the next letter.

**30 Apr 1865 from William Hale Davis to his wife, Sarah Jane (Ellis)**

**Davis**

Mariposa Creek  
April 30th            1865  
Mrs. S. J. Davis

<sup>36</sup> Smallpox vaccine was introduced in California in 1828 by James Ohio Pattie, who vaccinated natives and colonists (Groh 296). A scarifier made of wood with sharp prongs was used to introduce cowpox virus under the skin and provide cross immunity with small pox (Novotny and Smith 49; Hunt 129-133). The vaccinated area formed a lesion or “pox” and the vaccinated person often experienced a fever (Hunt 133) as Ellis noted.

Dear wife

I arrived here at your Pa's, last night & found A. O. [Miller] here & found your Pa, quite unwell but much better this morning. the first Day I left home I stayed at the Prescott ranch. The Next day I went to Scotts on the River, & staid all night there, there being no harvesting commenced on the River yet. I thought I would get hunters man and hunt up \_\_\_ So I came over here and struck a jobe with Miller we are going to work for Mrs. Herald at \$2.00 per day. We will try and send home some money the last of this week, we can get Plenty of work on the River in 8 or 10 days & we can get work here til then.

My health is good & millers also your Pa's family are all well. I feel very uneasy about you may god Bless and Protect you. Ciss our little ones for me my love to the Girls and Aggy. your Pa got a letter from W. J. he was at Los Angeles he is on his way up here or he says to some mining District. We are looking for him up there. Now my Dear wife take care of your self-God Bless you

Your affectionate Husband

W. H. Davis

The Girls says for Sophia & Mattie to write soon

W. H. D.

The family was congregating in Mariposa County. W.H. Davis left home to seek work near his father-in-law. Davis' brother-in-law, A.O. Miller, was already there. W. J. Ellis was reported to be moving to the mining district from Los Angeles. Having the family all nearby would suit T.O. Ellis.

The Civil War was coming to a close. President Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, and the war ended on May 6, with the surrender of the last Confederate troops at Shreveport, Louisiana (Grun 428).

By the fall of 1865, the family was apparently living within the bounds of Tulare County, as T.O. Ellis was elected Superintendent of Schools in 1865 and served six years (Menefee and Dodge 166). In 1866, Tulare county boundaries changed with the formation of Inyo, Kern, and Kings Counties out of Tulare, Los Angeles and Fresno Counties (Handybook 25). Additional boundary changes between Fresno and Tulare

Counties occurred in 1872, 1874, 1875 and 1876 (Tulare County History). The following letter between Ellis' daughters described their new home.

**10 Apr 1866 from Martha Susanna Ellis to Malinda Sophia (Ellis) Russel**

King's River, Apr 10th 1866

J.C.C & Sophia Russel

Dear Bro & Sister I avail myself of the present opportunity of writing to you, by way of remembrance.

Our family are well except for bad colds. We moved to our new home yesterday, which comprises 164 78/100 acres, 3 acres of which is in the Bottom. Pa, built on the bluff. we are all very well pleased with our place, one reason because it is ours, a Homestead.

I commenced teaching the 20th of March, I went before the Board of examiners and was elected without any trouble, there was several spectators present. Mary was examined the same time that I was, she will go to Millerton to teach whenever they get the school house done, they are very anxious for a school.

Lizzie is teaching school at Dry Creek; 12 scholars at \$30. dollars per month & board, she is coming home next Friday to see us. Perhaps you would liked to hear something about my school, I have 48 students at \$75 dollars a month. I have 4 or 5 grown young ladies, & one young man coming larger than Pa, 2 others 15 & 16 years old. Nannie assists me.

Mary & I had a very pleasant visit on Lower King's River in company with Pa, & Mr. Turner, were gone 4 days, stopped at Mr. Bliss'es & was at church on Sunday.

Sophia I will have to stop writing, I am writing at noon, & the scholars are running in and out, so much that I can scarcely write, my pen is very course as you will see by the writing. Grandma Hammond sends her kind regards to you & Grandma Russel. Mr. Turner sends his compliments to Mr. & Mrs. Russell.

Give my love to Perry & William & little ones, tell them that I will write this week. give my compliments to your mother & Bro. & Willie & do you my dear Bro & Sister accept the love of a Sister's confiding heart. Write soon & often & believe me as ever,

Your affectionate Sister,  
Mattie Ellis

Sophia do not let any one see this letter.

Mattie took a few moments out of her work day to pen a short note to her sister Sophia (right), apparently newly married.

The family was finally settled. T.O. Ellis was among the many settlers who moved to the Central Valley to obtain land through the homestead law or preemptions (“Land Sales;” “Good Land for Nothing”). Fresno County was briefly involved in gold rush, since most of the successful “diggings” were found to the north. The area was home to many stockmen, who resisted the entrance of farmers (Thickens 18).



**Figure 6: Sophia (Ellis) Russel, ca. 1870**

## **6 Apr 1866**

Centerville, Cal Sept. 6th, A.D. 1866  
Dear Wm & Jane

After a long silence I take pleasure again to drop you a few hasty lines. I cannot refer to your excellent Letters by date, having forgotten dates. For a long time I was pressed in Business, sometimes no paper, then out of stamps &, finally wounded in both eyes, but the worst of all calamities yet mentioned, I received 3 Letters from W. J. Ellis in rappid succession, stating his Wife's life was despaired of & she greatly desiring to see me before she died. In sixty minutes after the 3d letter reached me I was in my saddle & on my rappid march to Havilah. I left at sunset, Aug. the 25th of Aug & the first stop was at Agnes's, 20 minutes after one A.M., staid all night, left A.O.'s family all well, & next night staid at McGah's, & the horse giving out, sent him back to Visalia & mounted the Stage<sup>37</sup> & Monday night at 9 oclock arrived at W. having sent a remedy ahead of me 4 days. -Thank God the medicine I sent had a happy effect, & I found Jane Convalescent, & able to creep on the floor. Our Joy was full when we met. I staid till the 30th Aug. left her out of danger the rest all well except light chills. Jane was

<sup>37</sup> A stage route ran from San Francisco via Gilroy, through Visalia to Havilah (“Stage Routes”).

taken the 25th of June, Disease Hemorrhage of the Uterus occasioned by one kind of false conception called Molecular Conception. She came near dying. Josiah's Doctor Bill will be about \$80. dollars & what I did was of more benefit than all the medicine of two of their cracked Physicians.<sup>38</sup> The 30th I left for Home & reached by private conveyance my beloved family on Tuesday the 4th of Sept. & lo! & behold Sophia & Husband were at my house & both in good health. They brought mournful intelligence from your family concerning your Thumb. I do hope it is well ere this. My family, except Hindman, are well. Had it not been for being wounded in both eyes, & also going to H. I would have done very well as a Physician. I will live any way. I Praise God for his mercy toward us. After all the talk about sickness here in 70 families only two have died, & they among little children of Hooping cough.<sup>39</sup> Now, you cannot beat that. Give a dog a bad name & the first man with a gun will kill him. Upper King's River has a bad name & of course people will talk & kill it but facts & figures will not lie if men do.

Calhoun starts back in the morning but leaves Sophia, & expects to return by camp meeting on the 20th Inst. Can you, will you come? I doubt it, for I know something about promises.

Sept. 7, Seven oclock A.M. Sophia is vomiting, it is one of her Brash spells I suppose, Calhoun is fixing to leave.<sup>40</sup> Georgia is yet sick, but not dangerous. Your Ma wants yours & the children's Photographs to put into an Album. Every one send you love & compliments. W.J. & Wife & children send you their best regards & good wishes. Vincent<sup>41</sup> was well & family the last account. I wrote to him your P.O., he will write to you. Sophia sends her compliments & Apology for not writing; she says when Calhoun leaves she will write a long one if able. Don't fail to write often, even, if I do not write you must know I am busy, or, have some lawful excuse when I do not write. I do not think children ought to hold a Parent to any strict formality on that subject. Now the girls could often write when I cannot.

A. O. & Agnes are doing tolerably well he gets a great deal of work but saves nothing except what he lives on. We are looking for the

---

<sup>38</sup> Molecular conception refers to a mass (or mole) formed in the uterus by an abnormally developing ovum, or egg (Miller and Keane 634). Physicians were unregulated in California (at least up to the 1850s) and quackery was common in the frontier (Groh 178).

<sup>39</sup> Whooping cough is an infectious disease characterized by secretions of the mucus membranes and paroxysms of coughing, typically ending with a crowing respiration. It is caused by *Bordetella pertussis* and can be fatal, particularly in young children (Miller and Keane 1098). A common treatment for whooping cough was one ounce each of syrup of squills, syrup of ipecac, syrup of tolu and purified linseed oil. It was common for a mustard plaster to be applied to the chest as a counter-irritant (Hunt 145).

<sup>40</sup> A brash spell refers to a burning sensation in the stomach (Miller and Keane 148).

<sup>41</sup> Vincent Reed Burley Gray, T.O. Ellis step-son in Texas.

Cholera. The Atmosphere is very putrid this year.<sup>42</sup> Beef spoils the 2nd or 3d day, when hung up on Greenhorn Mountain.<sup>43</sup> Be very careful with yourselves & children. Above all things do not get scared, live temperately & trust in God in Christ & all will be well. My love to you & the children & regards to Mr. Watts & all friends. I am your affectionate  
 Father  
 T.O. Ellis Sen

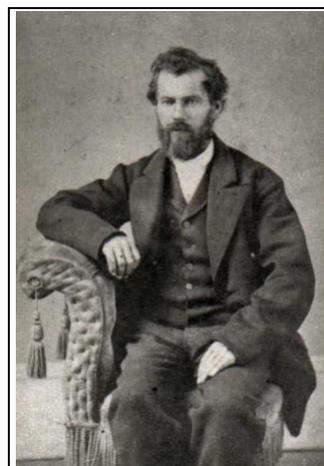
Centerville  
 Cal

[To] Wm. H. Davis  
 & Wife  
 Montgomery's Ranch, Cal

P.S. A.O. & Wife send you their regards. I have lost all of my Potatoes & corn & Garden by the hogs, worth over one hundred Dollars.  
 T.O.E.

[To] W.H. & S.J. D

Medical concerns dominate this letter. In an eventful trip, T.O. Ellis traveled about 120 miles to aid his daughter-in-law. The town of Havilah, east of Bakersfield in Kern County, was another Southern stronghold, and William Josiah relocated his family there in 1864 (“William Josiah Ellis”). T.O.’s trip to Havilah led him to lose wages from his own medical practice, and his frustration at the poor medical care his daughter-in-law received is obvious. He himself was recovering from an eye condition, his son-in-law had an



**Figure 7: J.C.C. Russel, ca. 1866**

injured thumb, and an epidemic of whooping cough settled in the community. Cholera was an additional concern.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Cholera is caused by *Vibrio cholerae*, which is transmitted by contaminated water or food. The disease can be rapidly fatal, with onset occurring a few hours to a few days after exposure, and rapid periods of vomiting and diarrhea which can lead to dehydration and death (Miller and Keane 206).

<sup>43</sup> The Greenhorn Mountains are southeast of Visalia, near Havilah (Gousha Road Atlas, Post Route Map).

<sup>44</sup> The first outbreaks of cholera in America occurred in 1832. There were three outbreaks, 1832, 1849-1850 and 1866 (Duffy 103-104). The cause of cholera was not known in 1865, and the majority of

T.O. expressed some disappointment in his sons-in-law, commenting that A.O. failed to save any money and he did not expect W.H. Davis to keep his promise about visiting Centerville. Son-in-law Calhoun (preceding page) left his wife Sophia at the Ellis home, which made Sophia ill, and to top it off, the hogs destroyed the potatoes and corn.

### 6 Oct 1866

Centerville, Fresno Co., Cal. Oct. 6/1866.  
My Dear William

In answer to your slow traveling Letter of the 23d Ultimo, [preceding month] I will say I have some considerable news to communicate—some things you were not expecting. I will however first talk of health. Wednesday night, 3d Inst. about Midnight I had an awful shake, had to be held in the bed, pressed down to keep from shaking to pieces & the blood seemed cold all through me. Next day I visited a patient 8 miles off & one 2 miles distant, but still poorly & now scarcely able to hold my pen to write. Georgia H. has been sick, but now, up & about. Your Ma is pretty pert. Calhoun has been sick with a Bowel complaint but better. Sophia remains In statu quo, that is as usual, no change but daily expecting one. The rest are able for their allowance when they can get it. Well, now for the hogs. They have eaten up all my potatoes & three fourths of My corn, damaging me over \$100. & still I never got mad, which I consider the best part of the story. But I have something better to tell you We have had a glorious Camp meeting with 29 accessions to our Church. It was a good time. I never saw a Revival I had more confidence in than this. The Devil is in the hogs & Grace getting in the people.<sup>45</sup> May the latter continue & the former disappear!

One more singular matter to tell. While the Camp Meeting was in full blast Mattie took a Buggy ride with a very wealthy Gentleman by the name of Fowler,<sup>46</sup> &, when she returned to the place of worship who should first greet her do you think? Yes before she got out of the Buggy?

---

physicians believed it was from the atmosphere, or miasma. Suspicions were growing that cholera was caused by “animalculae” (Groh 298). Calomel was a common treatment at the time, because it was believed that the purging it caused would rid the body of the “vitiated humors” caused by the miasma vapors. By 1866, ice water was advocated, which greatly helped to reduce mortality, since it actually helped the dehydrated patients (Duffy 104).

<sup>45</sup> This a reference to an event in the New Testament, when Jesus cast evil spirits into the swine (Matt 8:28-34).

<sup>46</sup> This might refer to Thomas Fowler, a well known Visalia area rancher, who married in 1868 (Mitchell 40-44).

Behold! Mr. S. J. Garrison presented his hand & Mattie sprung from her seat & again sat down, & then reached clear over F. & shook hands with her old Friend. Several standing round told F. he was knocked in to pie, & he looked vengeance but said nothing. In 30 minutes M. & G. were in the Buggy driving with as much composure as though they had enjoyed Angels visits. I had been to see a patient & as I returned to the Campground, who should I meet but Mr. G & Miss M. I bowed & passed on, but discovered a smile play on the lips of the mysterious parties. At night I was approached very politely by the Ex Editor, for such things inspire politeness as you very well know. & I was informed the Matter was most sweetly, jointly & severally adjusted & of course the question was popped to me for a blessing. A Dozen eyes were on me, but, but — well, I could not well help it, hated to make folks unhappy, &, so — what! Well I yielded. Yes I weakened & said Amen.

Sept. 31st Mattie accompanied with her sister Mary & Mr. G. went to Visalia to make some trimming & when they left the intention was to Celebrate the Union the 17th Inst. on Wednesday & have your family 7 all present. Strange to tell, I received a Letter very politely written Oct. 2/66 from Mr. G who asked my permission to let the affair come off Oct. 7th '66 at Visalia & I have yielded owing to the very awkward condition of our family which I need not explain as Sophia you know is here, not knowing the hour. So you see Mr. G. & his Intended have turned Union folks & will take the Oath of Everlasting Allegiance next Sunday,<sup>47</sup> Parson Turner the Officiating High Priest! Ere this reaches you, if no accident; the Die will be cast. The Indian once was eating fat meat very fast, & was asked why he was in such a hurry, he said "No like him want to get done quick". So I think, wish they all were grown & all Married quick in one day, Me no like im to lose all my sweet ones. Wish to have all the trouble in one week. But still I say, May God Almighty in Christ bless them all & take them to Heaven & Me & Mine with them. . . . Lizzie is keeping School on Dry Creek, & Mattie's on lower King's River is knocked into pie, hope Mary will get it, but can't tell. I think you had better stay with Mr. W. another year, it is better than any thing you have said or that I know. Write soon & come to see us if you can. All of us Send love

God bless you My Son & family

T. O. Ellis Sen.

[To] William Hale Davis Esq

Ill health continued in the Ellis household, with Dr. Ellis, himself ill, attending to patients miles away. The loss of the crops added to the situation, but T.O. found comfort

---

<sup>47</sup> Ellis is making a joke here, since Garrison was known to be a secessionist and refused to take the Oath of Allegiance to the Union (see 19 Jan 1863).

in a successful Camp Meeting and rejoiced in the 29 people who joined the church.

Another glimpse of humor appears in this letter, when he prides himself on maintaining his temper after the destruction of his crops.

The courtship of Mattie Ellis seems rapid, but the Ellis family had known S.J. Garrison since at least 1862 when he was the junior editor of the *Equal Rights Expositor*. In reporting the event, the *Visalia Delta* commented, “Ah! ah! That’s what brought you, was it friend G? Well, when a typo sets his head on marrying, there’s no use resisting, so we wish you all imaginable happiness and prosperity” (10 Oct 1866, 2). The paper also reports that the marriage took place at the home of A.O. Miller, with William McDaniel serving as justice of the peace (“Married”) which varies from the plan T.O. reported in his letter.



**Figure 8: S.J. and Mattie (Ellis) Garrison, ca. 1866**

The couple is pictured on the right.

The following letter was addressed to Jane, not William Davis.

**24 Nov 1866**

Centerville, Fresno County, Cal. Nov. 24/1866

My dear Jane,

I have waited for an answer to my last Letter to you & William, until I am tired, & though it is your place to waive such formalities, I have concluded to set the example by writing. The family are at present well. Those that have married are gone, & doubtless you enjoy their love & correspondence. Mattie has pleased me well in her Marriage with Samuel J. Garrison Esq. May the see Many happy days! Mr. G. is in the Clerks Office in Visalia, Deputy to Thomas Shackelford Esq.

with \$100. pr. Month as his wages. They Board for the present with Mr. Bowen, but will go to housekeeping the first opportunity. W. J. Ellis & family are in Visalia with Oscar. He is very poorly with a lung disease. I am very uneasy about him, as he is incapable of even feeding his horses. I have procured a house for them in one Mile of Me, & think he will likely move here temporarily. Mr. Millers family are well, except little Lizzie, who is puny. You have doubtless heard of Mr. Miller's painful difficulty caused by the testimony of one, who acknowledged himself that he was a Murderer & a thief. The Grand Jury lacked only one of not finding a Bill against him & Sam. Harp, Sheppard, the District Atty. used all his power & influence, inside & outside, to convict Harp, who was Prosecuted with A. O., but he failed, thank God! for, in less than ten minutes the Jury returned not Guilty unanimously! A crowd then went & released A. O. with a triumph, as they Atty. had entered "A Nolle Prosegin"<sup>48</sup> the sense of which is, I will proceed no further. Ten per cent as he is called, took strong ground against Miller & Harp, as well as, the Sweet Mr. Babe Williams,<sup>49</sup> whom, I stood up to when he & Bennet hung Carter of Elmonte. Very many said hard things against them & the other two, who helped them for big pay, & now I get my pay over the left shoulder. D. R. Douglas showed himself a man, & came forward unasked, & went on his, Miller's Bond for One thousand dollars, Keener \$500., Jesse Bird, My Texas Friend \$500, Frank Collins \$500. & some others - thanks be to them & Mr. Brown A.O.'s Atty., I will never forget them, so help me God. S. J. Garrison tiptoed & stood by A.O. nobly, & so did W.J. to the amt. of \$50. in a fee besides other help.

All we blame Oscar for was keeping so much bad company & picking up such low flung Scamps & boarding & feeding him - getting him into business & then Burdele swearing a willful lie against him, Miller. The Man who professed to turn States Evidence against A.O. murdered a man in the Atlantic states, & report says, took \$700. from him, & then ran to Cal.. when he changed his name from Martin Burdell to Charley Clifford, & for his pains is now in the Penitentiary. Poor fellow may God be merciful to him & bless him! Never did a Father & family struggle harder around the family Altar for a Son than we did for Oscar. We hope the Sad affliction will cure him of his drinking & gambling & be so sanctified, by the God of Heaven, for his good, as to make him a Christian. Let your Prayers, my dear Jane, unite with your dear Father's, that our - all our Friends may be changed & made alive in Christ Jesus! I will not multiply a Father's grief about the trouble he sees about his children, but ask you to join me in Prayer to God that they may reform, for without it all is lost.

---

<sup>48</sup> *Nolle Prosequi*, Latin. A formal entry on the record that the plaintiff or prosecutor is dropping a case (Guinagh).

<sup>49</sup> Babe Williams was a Mexican War vet and operated a saloon in Visalia. He was a staunch Union man, and thus probably not a favorite of the Ellis family (Doctor 2).

We have been looking for you & Husband & little ones to come & see us. What can be the Matter? Has W.H. set in for a new year with Mr. Watts? Keep us posted about every thing from time to time that may come under the notice of either of you. Your sister Mary is keeping school at Kingston in a half mile of Bliss' ferry.<sup>50</sup> Lizzie Keeps school on Dry Creek. Nannie & Georgia are well & at Home, the little Boys are pert & smart. Tell W. H. to write often our love to him, as well as, you & the precious little ones. A Father's love & a Father's Prayers for you & yours.

T.O. Ellis Sr.

[To] Sarah Jane Davis  
Husband &  
children

P.S. Direct to Millerton, Fresno County Cal. until we get a P.O. at Centerville. Should you direct a letter to Centerville, as it is not a Post Office, your Letter will land in Washington in the Dead Letter Office. Millerton is my Address, don't forget it. T.O.E.

[to] S.J.D.H.

T.O. opened this letter with a clear complaint that his children were not as faithful in their correspondence as he was. He was concerned about William Josiah Ellis, who was ill and staying in Visalia with the Millers. Ellis preferred that Josiah move to Fresno county while he recovered. His daughters secured teaching positions nearby.

The prosecution of A.O. Miller was not covered in the *Visalia Delta*, but reference is made to lengthy criminal trials causing a delay. The indictment of Sam Harp for stealing money from G.W. Williams merits one sentence. He was found not guilty ("County Court"). Further review of the criminal case may be helpful. T.O. attributed Miller's difficulty to "bad company," drinking, and gambling. Alcohol was a significant problem in frontier California.<sup>51</sup> Temperance was more to T.O. Ellis' liking.

---

<sup>50</sup>O.H. Bliss operated the Bliss Ferry at Kingston on the King's River ("Notice" Bliss).

<sup>51</sup> As a miner wrote, "this is a far better country to lay up money than it is at home, if a man will tend to his business and kep out of licker shops and gambling houses...there are murders committed about every day on account of licker and gambling..." (Paden, quoted in Groh 232).

As Ellis noted in his previous letter, Centerville did not have a post office, but the nearby community of Millerton did. Millerton was named after Fort Miller and was the Fresno county seat from 1852-1874. After trouble with the natives slackened, the Fort and Millerton were abandoned in favor of Fresno, further down the valley (Thickens 18).

**9 Jan 1867**

Millerton, Fresno County, Cal. Jan. 9/1867

Dear William  
& Jane,

Confined by the fire, & having been in my room one month, I am just barely able to inform you of the reception of your Letters & my late, dangerous illness. Having on the 13th of last month performed the Funeral services of our lamented Friend, Uncle Jimmy Tucker, well known to the family, with much ado I arrived at home, rested badly at night; the next day confined with Glandular Sore throat. Saturday the 15th worse, Sunday 16th the disease run into the Quinsy, called by Physicians Tonsilitis. Now, two, instead one disease, preyed upon Me. By one oclock Monday 17th could not Swallow, & in the P.M. same day the Family become alarmed, & began to devise ways & means to notify the Children, one & all, to witness the last of their aged Sire. Forthwith Lizzie & Mary were sent for, the first arriving at Midnight, the latter, Tuesday Morning day break the 18th, intending if the Crisis did not by that time pass favorable to dispatch two Messengers, the one to Mariposa Creek, & the other to Visalia. God be Praised! The Tumors, or Tonsils bursted, or were discussed (scattered) & I could swallow a little — very little. As this danger was giving way, another loomed up; the Gland under the left Jaw enlarged & hardened locking tight the left Jaw where it works, got worse & worse, using all powers to keep it from going back to the Throat, having failed to Scatter it, until Christmas day on which, we celebrate the Birth of our Heavenly Savior; when, the Family again became alarmed for My Safety. Being all the time in my proper Mind I had my own Prescription carried out, to which, under God, I owe my life. Christmas Evening I had a Physician sent for, who concurred with me the point to make the incision, which, when made blood flowed for some seconds, then matter & blood, & finally, pure Matter to a considerable quantity. Thanks to the world's Savior, I gradually, but very slowly improved until now. Yet, the swelling is not quite gone, & the lock of the Jaw not quite as free as before. I shall not magnify my Sufferings, nor

number my pains & danger, known fully only to God & myself, for it would trouble you.<sup>52</sup>

Suffice it to say, I am yet on the Mundane shores, Still reading the Bible night & morning & imploring help from on high to live happily & leave the world in triumph when our charge shall come. Mary while waiting on her Father took the same disease, & the same Prescription by God's Mercies, prevailed, & she recovered & has returned to her School at King'ston, Lower King's River. Lizzie's School was out the 5th Inst. & we expect her return home every hour. She is healthy & in fine spirits, as is also your Sister Mary. Your Ma & Nancy & Hindman, with the three little Boys are well. Our Finances are depressed in consequence of a Months expenses & loss of Business.

I suppose Calhoun [J.C.C. Russel] has explained to you the reason I gave him an order for Jule & her colt. He presented to me a Letter directed to him by Mr. Inglesby inviting him to take possession of the mare & pay charges, which I hope he has done, or will do. I could not think of taking \$30. for her without seeing her, because, when last Seen she, alone was worth to me, more than that. I will lose all or realize more than that. I doubt not your Judgement, but yet I could not be satisfied without seeing her before taking so little. I take this occasion to present my thanks for your kindness in getting her, & I wish J.C.C. Russell to pay you for lost time. Provisions I expect are a little higher here, than where you reside. Flour five, Beef on foot 7 to 8 Pork ten, Barley 2 by the Small. Rains plentiful & grass in great abundance. I & the rest desire to see you all very much. Your Ma, Sisters & Brothers join me in much love to you all. Hoping you are all well, & will do well, I subscribe myself your afflicted but improving Father evermore.

Thomas Oliver Ellis Sr.

[To] Wm. Hale Davis Esq.  
& Sarah Jane Davis  
& the Sweet precious  
little ones

P.S. W.J. & A.O. & S.J.G. & families well a few days ago. They have never come to see us since Camp Meeting. Mattie has never seen the family since her marriage. T O E

[To] W. H. D.  
S. J. D.

---

<sup>52</sup> Quinsy refers to a peritonsillar abscess (Miller and Keane 853). The course of T.O. Ellis' illness matches the textbook description given by Da Costa in his 1864 book, *Medical Diagnosis* (332-333).

T.O. Ellis reported on his recovery from a serious throat infection, most likely strep throat. The intermingling of medicine and religion are clear, and T.O. gave thanks to God, but directed another physician to assist in his treatment. Daughter Mary recovered also. The loss of income prompted T.O. to inquire about some horses he owned. Prices dropped after the end of the war, and it was hard to make ends meet.

T.O. again reported that the family was growing distant. He lamented that Mattie had not visited since her marriage in October. He mentions the children at home, including Nancy, pictured on the right.

The final letter in the collection is a letter that Sarah received from her step-brother, V.R.B. Gray, who had remained in Texas. She

added a postscript to the letter and forwarded it on to her father and mother. They apparently returned it to her. Gray served in the Confederate army (“Application”) and his sentiments are clear.



**Figure 9: Nancy Sylvania Ellis, ca. 1867**

**8 Mar 1867 from V.R.B. Gray to Sarah Davis, forwarded to T.O. Ellis**

Mrs. S. J. Davis  
Union P O  
Merced City  
Cal

what co. does Bro(?)  
live in

Marshall Texas March 8/67

Mrs Sarah Jane Davis

Dear Sister Once more I take pleasure in writing to you and Family, hoping this may Reach you due time and find you and Family Well. I am happy to say one more time that we are well, but how long we may continue, heaven only knows. For Sister, Sickness has been our lot for Several Months Past I Reckon the good Lord has sent a curse on us for our Wickedness. I have nothing to write to you Sister to day. Nothing knew has ocured of late. Weve almost become Heathenized, no Law or Constitution and our State is Terytorialized & Each Terytory is to have a Provisional Governor Appointed over us State allowed to Elect one \_\_\_\_\_ Each Terytory can Number 20,000 Voters. We are not allowed vote in Congress and Congress are trying to Make Negro Equality Stand Man to Man at the Ballot Box. They are trying to Bring in the Radicals and if they succeed Where will the South go? go down, down. Negro take Possision you must invite the Negro in, give him a chair to the Table. how can a law abiding man stand this. I have fought through one War and I am surely willing to shoulder my musket & fight the Black Demons before I would the like! If the Radicals Should over run and carry out this Platform all the Lands of Late Seceded States are to be Confiscated and thrown back as Government Lands Except a homestead of 40 acres allowed Each and Every Settler, or householder, then come darkies and get and equal showing will be the thing. A Poor White man have but little show. Without he can Conquer by force of arms. Which I think will be a good Policy.

Sister I shall quit the Subject for I suspect it will be all \_\_\_\_\_ to you as you are out of It. Tell Mr Davis I would be happy to form an acquaintance with him by Letter as we are Deprived otherwise. I become Excited sometimes when I study the situation we are in and I can't help it to think and Reflect Back in my Boyhood Days and Everything going on Wright & Everything confused and a man deprived of all Rights & Privilege. Oh our Bleeding Country. What will be left.

Sister excuse me if you please for my wearysome Letter. I want you to write soon. You are endebted to me a letter but I wont count visits. therefore write soon give my Respects & Kind Wishes to your husband, Mr. Davis & also your Babes. Tell me the number of Children you(?) & their names. I have forgotten them

We all Join together in Respects ours and all good bye for the Present

Yours affectionate Bro & Sister  
V.R.B. Gray (Vincent Read Burley)  
M. \_\_\_ Gray  
& Children

Marshall  
 Texas  
 to Mrs Davis  
 & family  
 Union PO  
 California

Please write soon and often Sis write to your Aunt Polly Capel at  
 Linflat P.O. & \_\_\_\_\_ Texas

Father & Mother

I have just received this letter from dear Bro & hasten to send it to you. It is the first that I have received. I want you to give me Aunt Polly's P.O. if you please. Is her name Capel is the P.O. Linflat or Jinflat give me the full backing of a letter to her. Pa will you give me Scripture confirming Paul as an inspired writer from our Lord do not fail<sup>53</sup> Mr D. & Bro. Cal, has just started to mill, all of us quite well, except husband's left eye, which is a little better. There is a little fester on the eye Ball, caused from a barley beard I presume. We are living in the hated(?) Adobe for a few days, as they are going to fix it up for Lister & Calhoun to live in. Edmon is not married yet. My opinion is that it will not be long.

I want to call our babe Vincent Garrison. What say you ma & pa. Are you coming to see me We have splended rainge(?) Mr D. does not know what he will or can do just now, will know when we write next time. You mare was with Bro's horses sunday, I presume is yet. We have not heard from your filly. Egleson promised husband to get her for ten dollars. The little colt is a falls(?) cold. We have a poor school here come and see us. Our little ones says many things about you all. We will visit you the first opportunity. certain of daughters unchangeing fidelity, \_\_\_\_\_ love for over all.

Your affectionate Sarah J. Davis

Sarah, in her postscript, mused about naming her newest son after her step-brother and brother-in-law, and requested a Bible verse, possibly to prove a point for the purpose of religious persuasion. The baby was named John Vincent (California 1880).

---

<sup>53</sup> The verse Sarah was seeking is II Tim. 3:16-17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

### *Afterword*

Dr. Ellis continued to be involved in the local Methodist church as a Local Elder. He attended the District Conference for Visalia District in 1871, 1872, 1873, and 1875 (Minute Book). He led prayers and benedictions and participated in committees, carrying on the themes he expressed in his letters such as religious instruction of youth and public worship. He was elected as a lay delegate to the Annual Conference in 1872. In the church circle he interacted with people from his earlier days in Visalia, such as Joel Hedgpeth and M.S. Merrill. In 1872 the District Conference was held in Centerville, where T.O. Ellis and family were living. That year T.O. Ellis chaired the committee on Sunday Schools and wrote:

We verily believe the design and object of Sabbath Schools is to Educate our children so as to lead them to Christ & conduct them to Heaven. To accomplish so great an object will require much time, patience & perseverance. Infidels and skeptics are disseminating light and sometimes poisonous literature to draw them from God and the Church. What must be done? What can we do? Let Parents and Guardians act in harmony with their pastors, superintendents and Teachers and let all make it a matter of Special Prayer to God for success. Our children should be directly pointed to Christ and invited personally to embrace the Saviour, and exhorted and animated to be faithful to the end of life and obtain Treasure in Heaven. (2)

In June of 1872, Thomas Oliver Ellis proved up on his land which he had claimed under the Homestead Act of 1862 (Homestead Certificate, Appendix ). Ellis continued to

be involved in education and was elected Fresno County Superintendent of Schools from 1868-1869 and 1872-1875 (Winchell, Dr. Ellis). He continued to actively practice medicine (Winchell, Madame Ellis).

The Ellis family continued to grow and spread throughout the San Joaquin Valley. William Josiah Ellis was active in politics, serving as County Assessor of Tulare County from 1869 to 1871 and later was Superintendent of Schools from 1879 to 1882 (“William Josiah Ellis”). William Hale and Sarah Jane Davis were flooded out of their home on Arkansas Creek in Fresno County in the fall of 1867 and relocated to Watts Valley. While living there the family was threatened by natives (“Colorful Career of Pioneer Is Closed by Death;” “Jefferson E. Davis”). On 6 Sep 1871, William Hale Davis was killed in a drunken argument on election day (“Homicide at Sycamore Creek;” “On Saturday the 9th...”). On 30 Sep 1871, Sarah Jane gave birth to a son, my great-grandfather, Walter Hale Davis, who joined four brothers and one sister (“Colorful Career;” California Death Certificate). The families of J.C.C. and Sophia Russell, A.O. and Lucinda Agnes Miller and S.J. and Martha Susanna Garrison continued to grow. Elizabeth, Nancy, and Georgia all married and began families soon after the letters end. Mary Carolina remained single and taught school. The younger Ellis children attended school in Fresno County (see Appendix A).

T.O. preached his last sermon the Sunday before he was confined to bed with the illness that would take his life (Peugh 7). He died 25 March 1879 of erysipelas (a streptococcal infection, “Death of Dr. Ellis”) in Centerville, Fresno Co., CA, but his letters afford him a lasting legacy and fascinating glimpse into California in the 1860s.

## Bibliography

“A Genealogical Record of the Ellis Family”, a portion of which is from a memorandum of the family prepared by Col. Thomas Harding Ellis of Richmond, VA in 1849, with additional notes pertaining to the Ellis-Gilliam and Ellis-Long families by Sarah Jane Ellis Davis, 34 pages, 1912, photocopy held in 1996 by Connie Davis.

“Address of the Anti-Abolition State Rights Society.” *Fresno Times*, 28 Jan 1865: 1.

“Affray at the Fashion Saloon.” *Equal Rights Expositor* 6 Dec 1862:2.

Anderson, Maureen A. “When the Soldiers Came to Town.” *Los Tulares*, 203 (1999):1-3, 6.

“An Indian was shot...” *Visalia Delta* 18 Apr 1866: 3.

“Appointments.” *Visalia Delta* 15 Oct 1859: 2.

“Assassination of Another Soldier.” *Visalia Delta* 13 Aug 1863:2.

Barnhart, Clarence L, ed. *New Century Cyclopedia of Names*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954.

California. Fresno County 1870 U.S. census, population schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 72. National Archives, Seattle Branch.

California. Fresno County. King’s River Cemetery. Tombstone data.

California. Fresno County. County Clerk’s Office, Fresno. Death Registers. Sarah Jane Davis entry. (book 5 p 51, photocopied 19 Jul 1994)

California. Tulare County 1860 U.S. census, population schedule. Micropublication , roll . National Archives, Seattle Branch.

California. Tulare County 1870 U.S. census. Micropublication , roll . National Archives, Seattle Branch.

Chandler, Robert J. “The Press and Civil Liberties in California during the Civil War, 1861-1865.” Diss. University of California, 1978.

Chandler, Robert J. “California’s 1863 Loyalty Oaths: Another Look.” *Arizona and the West* 21.3 (1979): 215-234.

“County Court” *Visalia Delta* 14 Nov 1866: 2

DaCosta, J. M. *Medical Diagnosis with Special Reference to Practical Medicine*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1864.

Davis-Ellis. Certificate of 1858 marriage. Los Angeles County, California. Issued 1995 by Los Angeles County Clerk. Copy held in 1996 by Connie Davis, 19026 Beall Rd. SW, Vashon Island, WA 98070.

“Death Notice (Thomas Oliver Ellis, Jr.)” *Visalia Delta* 18 Jun 1863: 2.

“Death of Dr. Ellis.” *Fresno Weekly Expositor* 13 Sep 1871.

“Destruction of Church Property.” *Equal Rights Expositor* 20 Sep 1862:2.

Doctor, Joseph E. “Rebels of Old Visalia.” *Los Tulares*, 48 (1961): 1-3.

Duffy, John *The Healers: A History of American Medicine*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

Ellis-Gray. Certificate of 1830 marriage. Cape Girardeau County, Missouri. Issued 1998 by Cape Girardeau County Clerk. Copy held in 1999 by Connie Davis, 19026 Beall Rd. SW, Vashon Island, WA 98070.

“Extracts of Correspondence.” *Visalia Delta* 2 May 1866: 3.

Fitzgerald, O. P. *California Sketches, New and Original Series*. Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1895.

“Fresno County...” *Visalia Delta* 1 Nov 1865: 2.

“Garrison.” Undated family history document, supplied by Lenoard Cecil Hubbard, 4057 Aladdin, Huntington Beach, CA.

Gilbert, Benjamin Franklin. “The Confederate Minority in California.” *California Historical Quarterly* 20 (1941): 154-170.

Gregory, Winifred. *American Newspapers 1821-1936. A Union List of Files Available in the United States and Canada*. New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1937.

Groh, George W. *Gold Fever, Being a True Account, Both Horrifying and Hilarious of the Art of Healing, So-called During the California Gold Rush*. New York: Morrow, 1966.

Guinagh, Kevin, transl. and comp. *Dictionary of Foreign Phrases and Abbreviations*, 3 ed. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1985.

Haller, John *American Medicine in Transition 1840-1910*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.

Harris, Henry. *California's Medical Story*. San Francisco: J.W. Stacey for the Grabhorn Press, 1932.

*History of Fresno County*. San Francisco: WW Elliott, 1882. (make sure this is the right history p. 1053).

- Holifield, E. Brooks. "Science and Theology in the Old South." *Science and Medicine in the Old South*. Ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.
- Holliday, J.S. *The World Rushed In*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981.
- Holy Bible*. Cleveland: World Publishing, 1611.
- Hurst, Harry. *The Alta Pioneers*, originally published in the *Alta Advocate*, 5 Apr 1924-10 Apr 1925, on page 28, book form.
- "I. O. Good Templars." *Equal Rights Expositor* 15 Nov 1862:1.
- "In the coast Counties, the grass is giving out..." *Visalia Delta* 23 July 1863:2.
- Kennedy, Elijah R. *The Contest for California in 1861*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1912.
- Kibby, Leo P. "Union Loyalty of California's Civil War Governors." *California Historical Society Quarterly* 44 (1965): 311-321.
- Krieger, Daniel E. *San Luis Obispo: Looking Backward into the Middle Kingdom*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Windsor Publications.
- Langley, Henry G. *Pacific Coast Business Directory for 1867*. San Francisco: Henry G. Langley Publisher, 1867.
- "Letter from King's River." *Visalia Delta* 7 July 1864: 4.
- Loofbourow, Leon L. *Cross in the Sunset: The Development of Methodism in the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the Methodist Church and of Its Predecessors with Roster of All Members of the Conference*. Vol. 1. San Francisco: Historical Society of the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, 1966.
- Loudon, Irvine, ed. *An Illustrated History of Western Medicine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- MacVicar, Barbara McClung. "Southern and Northern Methodism in Civil War California." *California Historical Society Quarterly* 40 (1961): 327-342.
- "Married." (Garrison-Ellis) *Visalia Delta* 10 Oct 1866: 2.
- McDonnold, B.W. *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, Nashville: Board of Publication of Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1899.
- McElhenny, John G. ed. *United Methodism in America*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982.
- McKay, Doug. E-mail to the author, 5 Feb 1999.

- Menefee, Eugene L. and Fred A. Dodge. *History of Tulare and Kings Counties, California with Biographical Sketches*. Los Angeles: Historic Record Co., 1913.
- Merrit, Denise Proed. E-mail to the author, .
- Methodist Episcopal Church, South. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church South*. Nashville: J. B. McFerrin, 1858.
- Methodist Episcopal Church, South. *Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. Rev. Ed. New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1849.
- Miller, Benjamin F. and Keane, Claire Brackman. *Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1978.
- “Minutes of the Tenth Regular Session of the Pacific Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South held in the city of Sacramento.” San Francisco: Towne and Bacon, 1860.
- “Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Session of the Pacific Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South held in Petaluma beginning October 7, 1863.” unpublished manuscript, 1863. held in archives of the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA.
- Mitchell, Annie R. *The Way It Was: The Colorful History of Tulare County*. self-published, 1976.
- Moore, John M. *The Long Road to Methodist Union*. Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1943.
- “More Help from the Ladies.” *Equal Rights Expositor* 2 Jan 1863:2.
- Norwood, Frederick A. *The Story of American Methodism*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974.
- Novotny, Ann and Carter Smith. *Images of Healing: A Portfolio of American Medical and Pharmaceutical Practice in the 18th, 19th, and Early 20th Centuries*. New York: MacMillan, 1980.
- “On Friday Night....” (relating the burning of the Wells home in Visalia) *Visalia Delta* 13 Aug 1863:3.
- Peugh, Georgia S. *Family Record of the Ellis & Leonard Families*. Ms. F-414865. Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- Ringer, Vicki. E-mail to the author. 18 Feb 1999.
- “Road to San Luis Obispo.” *Visalia Delta* 18 Feb 1860: 2.
- Shutes, Milton H. *Lincoln and California*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1943.
- “Secession Sheet Mobbed.” *Daily Alta California* 7 March 1863:1.

- Simmons, J. C. *The History of Southern Methodism on the Pacific Coast*. Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1886.
- “Stage Routes.” *Visalia Delta* 11 April 1866: 3.
- Terrel, Win. E-mail to the author. 31 Jan 1999.
- Texas. Upshur County 1850 U.S. census, population schedule. Micropublication M432, roll 916. National Archives, Seattle Branch.
- Texas. Upshur County Court. Thos. J Hayes vs. T.O. Ellis and J.W. McKinley. 1 Nov 1856, file no. 566.
- “Thanks to the Public.” *Equal Rights Expositor* 20 Sep 1862:2.
- “The secesh primary election...” *Visalia Delta* 16 July 1863:3.
- “To the Reader.” *Equal Rights Expositor* 30 Aug 1862:2.
- “Tour Through the Mines on the San Joaquin.” *Visalia Delta* 22 Oct 1859: 2.
- Tulare County Cemetery Index, Visalia Cemetery*. Online. California GenWeb. Internet 9 Apr 1998. Available <http://www.compuology.com/cagenweb/tcemvis.htm>.
- “Under the Ban.” *Equal Rights Expositor* 20 Sep 1862:2.
- United Methodist Church. *The Book of Discipline*. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992.
- “Visalia Select Seminary.” (advertisement) *Equal Rights Expositor* 4 Oct 1862:2.
- Ward, Geoffrey C. *The West: An Illustrated History*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1996.
- “Warm Springs House.” (advertisement) *Visalia Delta* 2 May 1866: 2.
- Watkins, T.H. *California: An Illustrated History*. Palo Alto: America West Publishing, 1973.
- “We have heard...” *Visalia Delta* 25 June 1863:3.
- Wesley, John. *Wesley's Standard Sermons*. Ed. Sugden, Edward H. London: The Epworth Press, 1921.
- Whorton, James C. Letter to the author. 28 Jun 1989.
- “William Josiah Ellis.” *Memorial and Biographical History of the Counties of Fresno, Tulare, and Kern, California*. : Lewis, 1891:341.
- “Who Escape Drafting.” *Equal Rights Expositor* 20 Sep 1863:2.

Work-Work. Certificate of 1860 marriage. Tulare County, California. Issued 1997 by Tulare County Clerk. Copy held in 1998 by Connie Davis, 19026 Beall Rd. SW, Vashon Island, WA 98070.

Yale, Stephen, PhD. Personal interview. 25 Mar 1999.

Yale, Stephen, PhD. email 12 May 1999.