“Chamberlain Boys”

According to family tradition, as remembered by Elrod J. and Vernon R. Chamberlain, grandsons of Luther F. Chamberlain, their grandfather and his two brothers, William T. and Milton went to California to search for gold in 1850. Luther was the oldest, being 28 in 1850, while William T. was 24 and Milton 16 years old. All had been born in New York State. The Chamberlains were some of the first farmers to settle in Cooper Township and actively participated in civic and political affairs. The only other report of them in California is from a letter published by the Kalamazoo Gazette on November 1, 1850, which states that they are in the vicinity of Hangtown, in September of 1850.

Luther F. Chamberlain (born March 10, 1822), died in West Cooper on November 9, 1893, at 71 years of age.

His brother, William T. (born July 5, 1826), died in West Cooper, May 27, 1900. Milton was born in 1834 and died in 1915, according to his gravestone.

Cooley, Benjamin

Four Cooley brothers, Thomas, Arad, Anthony and Benjamin, came to Kalamazoo County in May of 1831. Thomas and Arad bought land in Portage Township while Anthony settled at Bronson, later renamed Kalamazoo. Benjamin did not become a permanent resident. Anthony Cooley had a son, Benjamin, who died in Schoolcraft, Michigan, on September 29, 1889, at the age of 70 or 71. A news item in the Kalamazoo Gazette of September 6, 1850, reports that the Balches, Cooley and others were living 50 miles from Sacramento City. There are no data indicating which, if either one, of the above Benjamin Cooleys went to California in 1850.

Davis, Edward Hatch

Edward H. Davis, grandson and namesake of the gold seeker, vividly remembers his grandparents. He was ten years old when he attended his funeral at Mt. Home Cemetery in Kalamazoo, on December 4, 1899.

Davis came to Kalamazoo from Ohio in the 1840's to ply his trade of blacksmithing until March of 1850, when he and his brother Elisha were lured by gold to California. He stayed there about three years according to his obituary. Milo Goss (Kalamazoo Public Library History Collection, call number H920, G677), in a letter to his wife, states that Davis left for home from San Francisco by steamer on May 1, 1851. Davis apparently did well in California, either by blacksmithing or mining, or both, because he bought large tracts of farm land in Kalamazoo County upon his return. He also engaged in the dry goods business, and at a later date, was financially involved in a local wagon firm. He built the International Block and Hotel on the northeast corner of Burdick and South Streets, sometime in 1869 or 1870.

Davis, Elisha

Little information exists about Elisha P. Davis. He left for California with his brother Edward in 1850 (see above). An Elias Davis, age 37, is listed in the United States Census of 1850, as living in Charlestown
Township of Kalamazoo County, as married to Amelia aged 23, and as the parent of a young child.

**DeMott, Jack (John)**

Jack DeMott, a printer at the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, was 23 years old when he left for California on March 28, 1850. Instead of mining he plied his trade on the *Placer Times* in Sacramento, earning one dollar an hour. Kalamazooans were informed of the above by the E. R. Finley letter, published by the *Kalamazoo Gazette* on March 28, 1850.

The only other reference to be found relative to Jack DeMott is that he was assistant foreman of the Neptune Bucket Company and one of the managers of the First Annual Ball, given by the Kalamazoo Fire Department on January 14, 1847 (*Kalamazoo Gazette*, January 1, 1847).

**Dillie, David S.**

David S. Dillie, according to extant records, had a “squat claim” on Gull Prairie in 1830. The following year he moved to Kalamazoo. In one instance he is stated to be a cooper and in another he is placed at the intersection of Kalamazoo and Michigan Avenues, where he is making bricks. Perhaps he did both.

The United States Census of 1840 has an entry for D. S. Dillie, stating that he is between 40 and 50 years old, married to a woman who is 20 to 30 years of age and that they are the parents of five children. If this is the individual who went to California in 1850, then he was between 50 and 60 years old. David S. Dillie married Miss Julia O. Matthews at Comstock, Michigan, on February 18, 1837 (*Kalamazoo Gazette*, February 18, 1837). A short article about California in the *Kalamazoo Gazette* of January 10, 1851, reports, but doubts the truth of, a rumor that David E. [sic] Dillie has died in California.

**Drake, Benjamin, Jr.**

Two Drake brothers participated in the California Gold Rush. Francis left for the west on March 12 with 20 other Kalamazooans so that Clapp’s original party included his brother Benjamin, as well as Hays and Nearpass (*Kalamazoo Gazette* March 12, 1880).

“The late Benjamin Drake, Jr., who died [3-12-1880] while on a visit to Kalamazoo in 1880, and who had been many years before that one of the best known and most esteemed business men of this county, was born in St. Clair County, Mich., in 1830. He was a son of Benjamin Drake, Sr., and Maria (Ogden) Drake, the former a native of New Jersey and the latter of Canada. The younger Benjamin grew to manhood in this county and received his education in the public schools. In 1850, under the impulse of the excitement over the discovery of gold in California, he joined a party in a trip to that state, and there he spent four years engaged in packing supplies to the mining camps. Returning to Kalamazoo, he operated a livery barn for a number of years, then farmed in this county until 1870, when he went again to California, where he remained for ten years. At the end of that period he made another visit to his old home and died while it was in progress in

**Drake, Francis**

“The late Francis Drake, a native of this county, who died in California in 1894, after a residence of more than forty-three years in that and adjoining states, was the son of Benjamin Drake, one of the honored pioneer farmers of Kalamazoo county, where he lived on a fine farm three miles from the city of Kalamazoo. Benjamin Drake was born in Sussex county, New Jersey, on January 10, 1787, and on reaching his majority started in life for himself. His son Francis grew to manhood in this county and was educated at a school established by his father. He assisted in clearing and cultivating the home farm, remaining with his parents until 1850, when he was married to Miss Mary Goodridge, a daughter of Isaiah and Susan Goodridge, also pioneers of Kalamazoo County. The next year Mr. Drake left his young family and went to California in quest of gold, making the trip across the plains with ox teams and suffering untold hardships on the way. For a number of years he mined in California and Arizona with indifferent success, then went to packing supplies to Marysville and Placerville [California] with two pack teams which he owned. In this venture he prospered, doing a profitable business. The last years of his life he passed as a private detective for the Wells-Fargo Express Company. He also served as sheriff of two California counties. He died in California in 1894 and his remains were buried in California, where he had lived. His wife died in 1853, two years after he went to California. One child was born to them, their daughter Mary F., who is living in Kalamazoo”.

**Dunham, Alfred**

Little biographical data could be found about Alfred Dunham. The 1850 United States Census tabulates him as 28 years old, born in New York State, living in Kalamazoo Township, married and the parent of four children, all born in Michigan. When John T. Clapp wrote to his father, shortly after his arrival in California, he reported that he found the Dunham brothers at the diggings on Roses Bar on the Yuba River, some 80 miles west of Marysville. Both were well. (*Kalamazoo Gazette*, November 1, 1850)
Dunham, Wesley

All that is known about Wesley Dunham appears in the United States Census of 1850. It states that he was living in Kalamazoo Township, was married to Celia, aged 22, and was born in New York State in 1820.

Fitch, George A.

The Kalamazoo Telegraph was being published by George A. Fitch at the time he printed Clapp's California Gold Rush Journal. His paper was the first to espouse Republican political viewpoints in the state of Michigan. He was the son of Asa (born January 6, 1778; died September 8, 1877) and Sophronia Fitch (born October 25, 1790; died October 26, 1880), who had moved to Kalamazoo Township from New York State in 1836 or 1837. George Fitch, born in New York State, was 19 years old in 1850. He attended the Branch University in Kalamazoo from 1843 to 1846, then under the direction of Dr. James A. B. Stone. He is described by his contemporaries as a persuasive and forceful organizer as well as a vigorous and elegant writer. From Kalamazoo he went to Lansing in 1866 to be the State Printer. He moved to Chicago to engage in railroad and other speculative projects some ten years before his demise. He died at 50 years of age in Washington, D. C., on November 13, 1881.

Gilbert, Harvey

Almost no biographical details are to be found about Harvey Gilbert in the usual sources of information. Some newspaper items of 1850 to 1854 refer to an H. Gilbert, who may be Henry, a contemporary of Harvey Gilbert's. Only one California letter, of the several published in the Kalamazoo Gazette, mentions his name. John T. Clapp wrote to his father on August 29, 1850, that he found Harvey on Roses Bar, about 80 miles from Marysville. Gilbert, he reports, "...spoke rather discouraging of the mines, as though it was ten chances to one; and well he might, for, according to his own story, he never made much in the mines, even last year; and what he got he made by keeping boarders" (Kalamazoo Gazette, November 1, 1850).

Gingles, Christopher C.

Gingles established ownership of his copy of Clapp's journal by writing his name across the one which is a part of the Newberry Library rare book collection. He was the son of James and Hannah Gingles, early settlers in Prairie Ronde Township, Kalamazoo County. Christopher was born in New Jersey on March 10, 1836 and was brought by his parents to Michigan sometime prior to 1838 when his family is listed with "resident tax payers of 1838". Christopher Gingles died on December 28, 1910, at Schoolcraft, Michigan, where he retired after spending his life as a farmer and carpenter.

Hays, A. L.

A. L. Hays is as difficult to find data about as some others mentioned by Clapp. He may be the Albert Hayes [sic] who enlisted in Company C, 6th Regiment, Michigan Volunteer Infantry, on August 20, 1861, at Schoolcraft and served until his discharge at Kalamazoo on August 22, 1864. He was 23 years old in 1850 (United States Census, Kalamazoo County). In published letters from California Hays (no given name) appears only once when William A. Glover wrote on September 8, 1850, to say that Hays was with Wheatly and other Kalamazooans at Weaver, California (Kalamazoo Gazette, November 1, 1850).

McLennon "boys"

No mention of any kind of a McLennon, with any form of a given name, could be found.

McLenn, Curtis

Relatively little biographical information can be found about Curtis McLenn. The 1850 United States Census states that he lived in Kalamazoo Township, that he was 25 years old and was born in Vermont. He served as a volunteer in the 1st Regiment of Michigan Infantry during the Mexican War, enlisted on November 4, 1847, and left the service on August 28, 1848. McLenn left for California on March 28, 1850 in company with John Wheatly, Myron Stone, John DeMott and Orrin Mills (Kalamazoo Gazette, March 29, 1850). R. Blackett, in a letter dated November 21, 1850, and published in the Kalamazoo Gazette on January 17, 1851, states that McLenn and others "...have gone to the Southern diggings, on to the Rancharee and Mud Creeks". In 1853 McLenn had a ranch on the Sacramento River, about 35 miles from Forbestown (Eddie Atwater letter, Kalamazoo Gazette, November 18, 1853). Lack of probate, tax, death and other records indicate that Curtis McLenn probably did not return to Kalamazoo.

Mills, Orrin C.

Kalamazoo County Probate Court records indicate that Orrin C. Mills died intestate in San Antonio, Texas, sometime in December of 1862. He left a widow, Carolina S. Bangs Mills, and three children. No newspaper files or vital statistics are available in San Antonio for 1862. In the United States Census of 1850 he is listed as 21 years old, with two brothers, John E., 35 years old, and Charles, 28 years old. All were born in New York State and were living in Kalamazoo Township. He was a student at Kalamazoo College shortly after it was founded. Mills left for California on March 28, 1850 in company with John Wheatly, Myron Stone, Curtis McLenn and John DeMott, taking, the editor believed, the Arkansas route (Kalamazoo Gazette, March 29, 1850). In November of 1850, he was at the "Southern diggings" on the Rancharee and Mud Creeks (Blackett letter, Kalamazoo Gazette, January 17, 1851).

Neal

The only information about any Neal in the usual sources, like census reports, newspapers, probate records, county histories, directories,
etc., consists of an obituary in the Kalamazoo Morning Gazette of August 7, 1887, which states that Moses Neal, a well-known former resident, died at his home in Mattawan, Michigan. There is no way of knowing if Moses Neal had been in the Gold Rush of 1849.

Nearpass, William H.

Little biographical data about William Nearpass is to be found in the usual sources of information. About all that could be discovered is that the wife of William H. Nearpass died on October 12, 1848 at the age of 21 years, 6 months and 27 days, and that she was buried in the South West Street Cemetery, now a park in the area of Westnedge and Wheaton Avenues. A three-line advertisement in the Kalamazoo Gazette of October 10, 1856, calls attention to the fact that “Mr. W. H. Nearpass has become associated with C. H. Goodale in cabinet manufacturing business”. From a letter written by William A. Glover, dated July 28, 1850, and published in the Kalamazoo Gazette on October 25 of that year, we learn that Nearpass, Glover, Arad C. Balch, William Bryant and three other Kalamazooans, not mentioned in Clapp’s Journal, are living at Hangtown, California. A letter from Arad C. Balch dated August 29, 1850, states that Nearpass is at a mining camp five miles from Cold Springs, California (Kalamazoo Gazette, October 18, 1850). Balch “guesses” that they are doing well. Another letter, in the Kalamazoo Gazette of November 1, 1850, by William A. Glover, says that Nearpass is with the Chamberlains in the vicinity of Hangtown. All are doing well, except Nearpass, who is still troubled with sore eyes and is nearly blind.

Partington, Mrs.
(Inscription opposite preface)

The Yale copy of Clapp’s California booklet was dedicated on May 25, 1854, to “Mrs. Partington” by “her friend and well wisher”, Ellery Peabody of Kalamazoo, Michigan. “Mrs. Partington” was the pen name by which Benjamin Penhollow Shilaber was widely known throughout the United States. He was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on July 12, 1814, and died at Chelsea, Massachusetts, on March 25, 1890. Shilaber was famous as a writer, journalist and lecturer during the second half of the last century. Publication of his “Mrs. Partington Papers” and “Life and Sayings of Mrs. Partington” led to his nation-wide reputation as a humorist. Mr. Shilaber, alias Mrs. Partington, was a scheduled speaker before the Ladies’ Library Association of Kalamazoo, on March 11, 1857 (Kalamazoo Gazette, December 12, 1856).

Peabody, Ellery
(Inscription opposite preface)

The only information that could be gleaned about a Peabody in early Kalamazoo resources is that an E. Peabody was a member of the Excelsior Fire Company, No. 2, that advertised a “Second Annual Ball” to be held in Fireman’s Hall on Christmas Eve of 1854 (Kalamazoo Gazette, December 15, 1854).

Simpson, Robert

The Kalamazoo Gazette of March 15, 1850, reported that “A large concourse of citizens assembled at the Depot, on Tuesday afternoon [March 12, 1850], to witness the departure of another company of California adventurers from our village. The friends of those leaving – in many cases young and recent brides – mothers, sisters, fathers and brothers, all crowded around the cars, with aching hearts, to bid the dearest objects of the affections, God speed, upon their long and perilous journey”. Robert Simpson was one of twenty men in the group. Myron H. Stone wrote to George D. Rice, of Kalamazoo, on August 11, 1850, to give him a report on Kalamazoo County men in California (Kalamazoo Gazette, November 1, 1850). Among other things he stated that Simpson was in the area of Weavertown, which he estimated to be 50 miles from Sacramento. He also reported that the yield in gold was running from $1 to $500 a day. Only three other bits of information could be discovered about Simpson in local records. A son, John J. Simpson, was buried in the South West Street Cemetery on January 23, 1853, at the age of 2 years, 6 months and 18 days. An R. Simpson was included in the 1860-1861 Kalamazoo Directory (Loomis and Talbot) as a moulder, living on the south side of Lovell, between Park and Rose Streets. Lastly, a Robert Simpson is listed in the Kalamazoo Directory of 1869-1870 (James M. Thomas) as second assistant foreman of Burr Oak Co., No. 1, of the Kalamazoo Fire Department.

Stone, Myron H.

Myron Holly Stone was an adventurous soul. He was home less than two years after serving as a volunteer in the Mexican War, when he turned around and headed for California and its promise of instant wealth. He enlisted in Kalamazoo on November 5, 1847 and served in Company A, First Regiment, Michigan Infantry. From his army record we have the only physical description of a Kalamazoo participant in the Gold Rush of ’49: height 5 feet, 7 inches; complexion - light; eyes - blue; hair – brown. He read law, probably in Kalamazoo, and was admitted to the local bar on December 20, 1849 (Michigan Pioneer Historical Collections, Vol. II, page 313). The United States Census of 1850 has an entry for a Myron Stom [sic], age 37, who was born in Warren, New York. On the other hand, if he is the Myron Stone who appears in the Simon Stone Genealogy, by J. Gardner Bartlett (Stone Family Association, Boston, 1926), then he was born in Pittsford, Monroe County, New York, on June 27, 1814 and came to Michigan with his parents in 1831. They settled at Ray, Macomb County, Michigan about 1843. When he came to Kalamazoo is not known. Stone is said to have died “somewhere” in Michigan in 1871.

Walbridge, Frank E.

Frank E., like his brother Samuel E. Walbridge, was the son of David S. and Eliza Taggart Walbridge. When the United States Census was compiled for 1850, Frank E. is tabulated as living in Kalamazoo Township, 22 years old and as having been born in New York State. He enlisted
in the Second Regiment, Michigan Volunteer Cavalry on September 2, 1861. He first served as a Lieutenant. On June 14, 1862, he was promoted to Assistant Quartermaster of the United States Army.

The two brothers left for California on March 12, 1850, in company with several other Kalamazoo men, many of whom are mentioned in Clapp's journal (Kalamazoo Gazette, March 15, 1850). The same paper of August 30, 1850, reported that they had safely reached the mines in California. The two brothers probably first prospected for gold. Soon, however, they switched to keeping a dairy farm, hoping to sell milk to the people of Sacramento (Kalamazoo Gazette, January 17, 1851). In July of 1852, the two are stated to be the last of the Kalamazoo California contingent at Sacramento (Kalamazoo Gazette, August 27, 1852).

Walbridge, Samuel E.

Samuel E., brother of Frank E. (see above) was also born in New York State, around 1826. The Walbridge family came to Kalamazoo in 1841. The father, David S. Walbridge, bought grain, built mills and shipped flour out of the area on flat boats he built and operated on the Kalamazoo River. In the 1860's Samuel E. Walbridge was known in Kalamazoo as a merchant, miller and proprietor of the Cold Stream Mills. He died at his home in Kalamazoo on February 25, 1883 (Kalamazoo Gazette, February 27, 1883).

Wheatley, John B.

This is another early Kalamazooan about whom there is little biographical information. The United States Census of 1850 reveals he was 26 years old at that time, came originally from New York State and that he was a resident of Kalamazoo Township. The Kalamazoo Public Library Vital Statistics File indicates that he was a Canadian by birth and 75 years old when he died on September 9, 1900. He and Myron H. Stone, Curtis McClain, Jack D. Demott and Orrin C. Mills—all mentioned by Clapp—left for California on March 28, 1850. In November of that year he was reported at Weaver, California, by William A. Glover (Kalamazoo Gazette, November 1, 1850).

The Kalamazoo Directory of 1860-61 (Loomis & Talbot) lists him as a millwright who is living on the south side of Lovell Street, between Park and Rose Streets.

Winslow, George W.

George Washington Winslow was one of Kalamazoo's earliest settlers. He was born August 9, 1805, in Coleraine, Franklin County, Massachusetts. For a while he practiced his trade of stone cutting in Buffalo. In 1835 he came to Kalamazoo and became a dealer in general merchandise until the Panic of 1837. In September of 1848, he was back in the marble trade, making many of the handsome tombstones still to be found in Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo County cemeteries. He was active in local social and political affairs.

Winslow left for the California gold fields on February 27, 1850, with eleven other Kalamazooans. The party included Amos Browson, Arad C. and Samuel Balch (Kalamazoo Gazette, March 1, 1850).