

Letter from Emily Meredith to "Father," April 30, 1863

*Bannack City, Idaho
April 30th 1863*

Dear Father,

I have felt so uncertain about the reception of the various letters I have written home since my arrival here, that I have thought when I had a good opportunity I would write you a kind of abbreviated history of my wanderings since I left Bridger, at which point I know you heard from us. Such an opportunity seems to be presented for Dr. Hoyt proposes leaving here for Minnesota; he may never reach there, but as he will probably travel in a large company I consider him a safer carrier than the express. . . .

I think it was on the sixth of September we arrived here & for more than a month after that no one felt certain enough that they could remain here to build. Many anticipated a severe winter because we are so near the top of the range; others thought the Indians would not allow us to stay, or that if white people enough came in to obviate that difficulty there would be actual starvation, some thought the mines themselves would be exhausted in two or three months, or at best it would be impossible to work them longer than that, until quite late in the spring.

Fortunately none of the forebodings were prophetic. We have had a very mild winter; the Indians have done nothing more than steal stock & kill stragglers; there has been plenty of provisions at prices which although exorbitant every one has been able to pay; the mines have been worked all winter—& not until within the last three months has their real richness been suspected.

I know of one claim bought last fall for a set of house logs cut in the woods fifteen miles

from here & sold this spring for \$3000. cash. Claims which could have been had for the taking when we came in & which could have been purchased last winter for \$100, or \$200, now rate from \$1500. to \$2000. I know one bar claim which sold for \$7000., but the risk of buying at such prices is so great that would much sooner be the seller than the buyer. Nevertheless it is not strange that claims should rate so high when they occasionally prove so inordinately rich. In one claim \$2500. was washed out in about three hours. I saw the gold washed out of one wheelbarrow full of dirt taken from another claim weighed & it weighed exactly two ounces (36\$). These sound like regular Salmon river stories, but they are true, but in neither case would this be the average yield.

It is difficult to know just how to write home about this country. A list of the prices of things here would make most persons in the states suppose there must necessarily be suffering; if we say that people pay \$25. per 100 lb. for flour as easily as \$1.50 at home the general opinion would be that money must be quite plenty & people getting rich fast. Neither opinion would be quite correct. Every one seems to be getting along, very few are discouraged, but comparatively few have, to use a westernism "made their pile." . . . anyone who is shrewd & *has money* can make money here now. How it will be with those who come in I know not; unless there are other mines struck they will have but a poor chance, but in all probability there will be other mines struck.

There are but few things a man can do here now. Freighting, teaming & ranching are profitable but risky on account of the Indians; gardening will pay extremely well if anything can be raised, but no one knows yet whether

there is any night in the year free from frost. (There were heavy frosts in August when the mines were first found). The name by which this stream is known, Grasshopper Creek, seems to indicate the presence of another foe. Mining does very well for those who have claims but if I had one or two thousand dollars spare cash I should not like to put it in the ground for fear it might prove as you say “a permanent investment.” I never would advise anyone to come to a new mining country because there is a great deal to risk & a great deal to endure, nevertheless many persons undoubtedly will come here this summer & make more than they could in years at home. And they ought to, a person ought to make money pretty fast here to pay them for living in such a place.

I should like to see a pagoda or a mosque or anything to indicate that there is a religious principle in man. If “labor is worship” this is a most worshipfull community, but of any other

kind of worship there is no public manifestation whatever. I verily believe two thirds of the people here are infidel and “Secesh.”

I don’t know how many deaths have occurred this winter but that there have not been twice as many, is entirely owing to the fact that drunken men do not shoot well. There are times when it is really unsafe to go through the Main Street on the other side of the Creek, the bullets whiz around so, & no one thinks of punishing a man for shooting another. What do you think of a place where men will openly walk the streets with shot guns waiting for a chance to shoot some one against whom they have a grudge & no one attempt to prevent it?

Emily R. Meredith

Source: *Emily R. Meredith Papers, 1862–1867. Small Collection 288.* Montana Historical Society Research Center. Archives. Excerpted in *Not In Precious Metals Alone: A Manuscript History of Montana* (Helena, 1976): 35–36.