

## Pittman purchased hotel for \$225

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Some time late in 1854, Charles and Louisa May Pittman arrived in San Francisco after a long and arduous journey.

During his previous time in California, Charles Pittman had purchased “a block on Kearney Street, then but a sand hill,” before going on to Grass Valley where he owned and operated a hotel. This time he and his young wife purchased and operated the City Hotel, which seems to have been located on or near Kearney Street.

While historical sources speak of their success in this venture, family letters hint at some difficulties. Charles’ mother, Elizabeth Pittman, wrote from Bristol on May 31, 1855, (with the typically creative spelling that all the letters in this collection show):

“My Dear Son and Daughter,

“Your kind and welcome letter came safe to hand ... happy I was to hear you was in good health ... I have been very anxious to receive letter from you ... the time seems so long... your Brother William wrote to the first of February ... you ought to received in April .. he directed it to the City Hotel and I hope you have received it safe ... my Dear Son you don’t tell me what you are doing I am afraid the times is not so well there as you wish for but I hope by the time you receive your Mother’s letter it will be going on better there ...

“Respecting the money I have not touch that you left me in the Bank and it is for your service at any day ... if I could send it safe to you you know you always been my friend and God will reward you for it ... you haven’t never want if you look to him ... he provides for the Fatherless and the widow ... I wish you had stayed here and got in some business ... it must have cost you so much money in going back all through ...”

Another letter by Elizabeth Pittman seems to throw a bit more light on the difficulties the young couple had to face. Both the Pittman and the May families apparently exchanged any news they received from their children.

On September 28, 1855, Elizabeth wrote: “I received your kind and welcome letter. Came safe to hand and happy I was to find you both in good health as it leaves me. Pretty well at present thank God for it ... I have to tell you I bear up in hopes of seeing you both some day ... I wish it was coming soon .. the time seems long since I leave

you both my Dear Children ... we did not receive your first letter that you wrote to inform us of your safe arrival that made us all very unhappy about you both ... I hear from your Dear Mother that my Dear Son had the fever after you reach there ... O what a sad thing after being on the sea so long to have such trial to bear with and how good God was to raise him up again My Dear Children you put your trust in God and he will help you through all your trials as he do mine ...I shall be very happy to hear when you are in your Hotel once again ... I hope you will be prosperous to gain a little to help make up for what you lost my dear Children...

Possibly Charles picked up a tropical illness while he and Louisa made their way across the difficult terrain of the Panama Isthmus. Elizabeth's words also hinted at some difficulty in occupying their hotel.

She concluded her letter with a wistful thought: "... I suppose by this time I am grandmother." And indeed, she was.

Louisa Pittman owned a little black calendar for the year 1854, probably brought from England, in which she recorded bits and pieces of her life over the next 20 odd years. Addresses, little notes to herself, accounts and financial transactions, her daughter Carrie's first attempts to draw with a pencil and write her name - all found their way into this book.

For June 6, 1855, the entry read: "Mrs. Ladwith on Pine Street between Kerney [sic] + Dupont. 3 doors from Dupont Street. Midwife."

And on September 19th, 1855, she recorded the birth of her daughter Carrie: "Dear baby born."

The news made their way back to England surprisingly fast. Jane Collins, Louisa's mother who had remarried after Mr. May's death, commented on Carrie's birth on September 30.

"We was all very happy to hear from you Dear and to know that you was both well and I am thankful to say we are all well at present and I hope by this time you are out of trouble my Dear Child and all well with you and your Dear baby ... how glad I should be if I could see you my dear Child and the Dear baby but I must be thankful to the Lord that I can hear from you ..."

In another entry on Friday, October 26, Louisa recorded the length of her confinement to the house: "Out for first time. Called on Mrs. Whittbeck."

During this time, Charles Pittman undertook several business trips to Sacramento,

taking the land route through Benicia and Cordelia. Likely, he stayed overnight at the Cordelia Hotel and must have found the area to his liking.

In the summer following Carrie's birth, he purchased the Cordelia Hotel from A. Chrysler, sold the City Hotel and moved his family out to Cordelia. The handwritten bill of sales fortunately survived:

"Cordelia Cal., Aug. 12th, 1856. Sold this day all my title, interest and assets of the Hotel in Cordelia, Containing all the furniture, accounts, bills and assets belonging to said Home. I this day release all my claims for this sum of two hundred + twenty five dollars paid in hand. My board and the keeping of my horses until Monday next free.

I deliver all unto C. J. Pittman for the above named sum of money in the presents [sic] of witnesseth. A. Chrylser."

A Mr. J. M. Thompson signed as a witness.

The Pittman's settled in, purchasing additional lands along the road and well into Green Valley.

Louisa continued her sporadic entries into her calendar, noting important moments such as an entry made on one May 28 (no year is given): "May 28 - O/C [on account] wine in memory of our wedding."

Much sadder is another entry, dated by year also: "June 1859 - Baby sister still born." Carrie would remain the couple's only child.

Louisa must have occasionally yearned for the social life a larger city could offer. Several letters written in 1856 and in 1858 show her enjoying a respite in San Francisco and Sacramento respectively and allow a charming glimpse into her marriage.

On March 14, 1856, Louisa wrote to Charles from San Francisco, where she was staying with friends of the couple:

"My dear Charlie, I was very glad to see a line from you this morning. I am enjoying myself first rate, love the city dearly ... wish we could live here, have seen Mr. & Mrs. Hunt Parrish's and several of our old acquaintances ... Mrs. Dick & I went to a party Saturday evening yesterday, Mr. Dick took us to see the great republican ship, there was hundreds on board the largest I have seen ... our little one is real happy here, quite at home with Mr. Dick ... goes to him at meal times as she did when home to you - we have bought the paper ... will get the cigars but you know I have not cash with me to

pay ... Mrs. Dick is going to Sac City Wednesday ... I shall leave for home the same day. I have been to the office for help, expect I can bring a girl down, ... there is lots of things good and cheap, a cooking stove which will suit us well for twenty dollars... will cost but little to send up ... I hope everything is all right home ... you do not complain."

Hiring help in the larger city to take back to the Cordelia Hotel seems to have occurred frequently.

In March 1858, Louisa made an extended visit to Sacramento to enjoy city life there.

"We are having a real good time here, the little one is well and happy. Should have written last week but intended to be home - if you have no objection would like to remain one week longer, have been to the theatre and no less than four parties ... Say dear send me up ten dollars ... I won't ask for any again for a year - the stage passes the door [of the American Eagle Hotel where she stayed] and the driver can leave it by hand..."

Charles supported his wife and returned his answer with the money she asked for immediately on March 24.

"I received your letter yesterday ... I feel happy you are enjoying yourselves ... I had begun to be surprised you did not write before but even late than never ... we have had two or three cold nights I was nearly froze for the want of somebody to keep my back & B warm. ...

"I send that by the driver of the stage ... he may not have time to bring it up ..."

After signing his letter, he added a post script "don't let it exceed a week as I am getting lonely."

Theirs was a short marriage - Charles Pittman died only a few years later, on December 3, 1864, barely 40 years old. No formal seems to exist, so that the cause of death remains unknown. Could it have been the aftermath of the illness he picked up on his way to California?

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