

## How a courtship proceeded in the 1870s

**By Sabine Goerke-Shrode**

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This column continues the story of the courtship of Thomas Jefferson Mize, also known as "TJ" or Jeff, and Mary Melissa Creighton. Both kept a diary, Thomas covering the years 1873 through 1875 and 1878, Mary covering the years 1874 and 1875.

While the Creighton family had arrived in Vacaville from Troy, Iowa, in 1862, Jeff and his brothers, Fleming Davis Mize and Jones Mize, did not migrate to Vacaville until 1873.

On his first visit to the Creighton family in May 1873, 26-year-old Jeff immediately was attracted to the pretty, vivacious 17-year-old Mary.

Jeff quickly found work as a schoolteacher. Mary spent much of the later summer months and winter of 1873 in San Jose, finishing a course of music. Her goal was to be a music teacher. A talented musician, she played piano and accordion.

By December 1873, Mary had returned to Vacaville. She applied for a position as a music teacher in Vacaville, but was not accepted. Instead, she gave private lessons, charging \$5 a month for one lesson per week.

Jeff renewed his efforts to attract Mary. On Jan.1, 1874, he noted in his diary:

"Today I again visited at Mr. Creighton's. I pay my addresses to Mary while Bro. Davis looks after Lue (Mary's sister Lucretia). He is a good boy but has a very limited knowledge of the nature and disposition of women and consequently knows not how to be agreeable."

Mary, on the other hand, simply noted in her diary for that date:

"No one but the Eversoles and the Mize boys came, but we had quite a pleasant time." Jeff's superior knowledge of being agreeable did not seem to have impressed her. Instead, she was attracted to John McMahan.

Like the Mize and Creighton families, the McMahan family originally came from Iowa and settled in San Jose. Mary boarded with the family while she stayed in San Jose.

Jeff recorded some unfavorable memories of John: "Years ago at the public school in

Troy, John McMahan was my little boy schoolmate. He always went around charged with a dirty nose and foul mouth, consequently he was known among the boys as the little 'snot-nosed blackguard with a squint-eye.' "

Although Jeff's assessment of his rival may have been fueled by jealousy, Mary's parents also disapproved of her friendship with John McMahan. Nonetheless, the young man came for a visit in early January.

On Jan.10, Jeff noted: "When bedtime came John and I turned in together. John was free to talk, so I pumped him pretty thoroughly. He said he came to Suisun on business and as he was so close to his old friends, he thought he'd make a call. He expressed himself freely about Mary's temper and conduct while boarding at their house in San Jose, nothing bad but foolish to repeat; still I had him tell it all. Why? Because the partitions were so thin that as the girls slept at one side of us and the old folks at the other, all parties could hear everything he said as he spoke loud. In questioning him I spoke in a low tone that I might not be heard."

Like many jealous persons, Jeff decided to play hot and cold with Mary to see what her response would be. On Jan. 12 he recorded: "I left Creighton's this time with no demonstrations of affection at all towards Mary. I noticed that she lingered on the poarch (sic) as we made our departure, but I did not turn to give her a parting smile nor did I throw a kiss at her. Mary indicated nothing about continuing our correspondence. I held my tongue also, as I expected to see them again ere I should leave to stay away, and also I wished to give Mary a little time to reflect that she need not be too sure of many strings to her bow "

Although Mary liked Jeff, her diary does not indicate how deep her feelings for him were. The diary also seems to have been less private than Mary may have wished, likely one reason why she did not elaborate on her feelings in writing.

Jeff, too, was unsure about her feelings. On Feb. 1, he wrote: "Yet notwithstanding the love I have for her, I have no conclusive assurance that she loves me. She has thus far kissed me but once and that was on Christmas Day, Dec. 25, 1873. I have always made it a point never to kiss a girl unless she seems to enjoy it as much as I."

Mary continued to try and find students for piano lessons, initially without much success. By that time she seemed to have lived in Vacaville during the week. On Feb. 28, she noted in her diary: "Went out home this morning, How I dreaded to go and tell them (her parents) I had no scholars yet, but they received the news quite sympathetically and gave me all the encouragement they could."

Jeff, too, was concerned with finding a new job as a schoolteacher. In March, he found

employment with Pleasant Valley School for a salary of \$65 per month, which included boarding. There seems to have been politicking going on with his hire:

"The trustees had by this time heard various reports about me and were in doubt whether it would be policy to employ me or not. One of them went to Vacaville to enquire (sic) of Eversole (Mary's brother-in-law) and he referred him to Bingham after he had spoken in my favor. Mr. Bingham stated that I had taught the school in his District and gave satisfaction and he would not hesitate to employ me again. The church at Vaca Station (Elmira) split and my brother Davis Mize went with one faction and the other tried to bring me and the school matters in to spite him."

March saw him moving to his new boarding house. Reading these entries, it is striking to observe the distances everybody covered by walking.

On March 21, Jeff noted: "I walked to Mr. Pleasants where I borrowed a horse to ride to the Station to put my trunk in shape to come to Pleasants Valley. Returned to

Mr. Creighton's, found all at home and had a very urgent invitation to stay overnight but could not. I staid (sic) for supper after which Mary and I footed it to Vacaville. All seemed lovely as ever. Mary said she wished I could stay to practice singing with them. I went to Eversole's and then back a part of the way to church. Bade her good night and started for P. V. (Pleasants Valley). It was now sundown but the moon shone until I was past the worst part of the road."

In the meantime, Mary had decided - or been pressured by her parents - to give up her friendship with John McMahan. The young people had been secretly engaged, but without David Creighton's permission, marriage was not possible. Throughout the first days of March, she was trying to talk to her father to ask for permission to marry John, but the time never seemed right. Eventually she noted: "I gave Father the note, and tho I felt I had performed my duty I dreaded lest I had broken his heart."

On March 18, she noted that: "Father gave me an answer to my letter. Ironed almost all day. Mother and Sister came up." Her father had refused to give his permission to their marriage.

On March 20, she "Wrote the dreaded letter to My Boy (John McMahan)." Three days later, she had his letter. "Received an answer to my letter and am so happy - God bless My Boy," she commented on John's understanding response.

A few days later, she noted: "I read all the precious letters and put them away. Commenced my last letter. Done up the ring How I longed to keep it but I mean to do just as near right as I know how."

Jeff's diary does not indicate whether he was aware of this development. He continued his efforts to attract Mary. On Saturday, April 18, he "Borrowed a horse from Mr. Pleasants and went to meet Mr. Creighton's folks on their way to the hills for a pleasure trip. I met them and all appeared happy. Having arrived at the shanty where they intended to stop, we ate our dinner and then rambled along the creek. Mary and I had a real pleasant visit. All to ourselves and she appeared much more pleasant and lovely than ever and I seemed to enjoy her company very much. Nothing of the past was mentioned; neither of the future, but I fancied that there were thoughts not only of the past but even anticipated happiness in the future, at any rate actions spoke where words were silent."

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