

Diaries reveal a persistent courtship

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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This installment continues the story of Thomas Jefferson Mize, also known as "TJ" or Jeff, and Mary Melissa Creighton, based on their respective diaries during 1874 and 1875.

From the moment he contacted the Creighton family after his arrival in Vacaville in 1873, Jeff Mize had been enamored of Mary Creighton. She, on the other, hand had gotten herself engaged to another young man. After her father refused permission to marry him, she slowly turned her attention to Jeff.

Like most Sundays, Jeff spent time with Mary on April 19, 1874. "After dinner Mary & I had a very pleasant visit all to ourselves. By Mary's request I remained in the kitchen while she cleared up the table & straightened up affairs generally. But before she went to this work we had a half hour's chat side by side & hand in hand. I also noticed that the plain gold ring which she had heretofore worn was removed. Why this was done I know not & I made no reference to it. She had previously said she did not love me & yet she seemed to let no opportunity pass in which we could possibly be together alone & her actions seemed to contradict her words."

Besides being uncertain about Mary's feelings for him, Jeff also faced troubles with his teaching job at Vaca Station. In an April letter, he wrote: "I have taught from time to time since 1866 & have met with success wherever I have been except at Vaca Station & all were pleased there who had brains enough to appreciate merit."

He also found new lodgings with the Pleasant family after lodging with the family of G. W. Thissell. Their son, George, was one of his students. Jeff had to discipline him for using profanity at school as well as exhibiting "ungentlemanly treatment to Mary Hinckley."

Jeff felt that he needed to provide "protection for the girl and bring the boy to just punishment." The Thissells backed their son and withdrew their three children from the school in protest.

Late in May, the strawberry festival kept Mary busy. On the day of the festival, she made custard for strawberry ice cream, provided music instruction and arranged flowers, after which she helped serve at the strawberry stand all evening. Jeff noted in his diary the following day, May 23: "Mary looked rather the worse of the ware (wear) of

the previous evening.”

The young people saw each other on a regular basis and Jeff seemed to be part of the family. On Monday, June 22, he noted: “I came to Vacaville on the train this morning Called at Mr. Creighton’s about 10:30 and found Mary gathering cherries in the front of the house. Her garments were not such as she usually wears when she is expecting company, but were very appropriate for fruit gathering.

“When she saw me she shrunk from my presence but I went to where she was & carried her basket of cherries to the house for her. (Sister) Sade was just coming out to sweep the front porch. I took the broom & did the sweeping while Mary went on to her work. She was busy until after the dinner dishes were washed. Then she curled her hair ever so nicely, put on a nice black alpaca dress & seated herself at the sewing machine for a little sewing. We passed a very pleasant p.m. together. I left them at 6 p.m. & took the train for the Station ...”

At Vaca Station, Jeff taught the older students and his diary reflected concerns on how to handle his teenage female students. On August 2, he noted: “It has been a question with me how much attention it is safe to pay my big girl pupils & not cause talk or trouble in the school & yet I must treat them all with due civility or there will be trouble. I observe these big girls allow the other young men to be quite affectionate with them when they are alone with them & I being human enjoy loving & being loved but is it policy to treat my pupils as I do my friends who are not my pupils? At their parties they often play kiss games but do they expect their teacher to hug & kiss them? It is a question, for there might be some partiality shown & then there would be trouble. So consequently I prefer singing parties.”

He sounded even more perplexed the following day. “Mona Rice is one of my big, good girls & she seems very anxious to be with me all she can, but I notice the others always have an eye on us when she comes near my desk. The girls are very cunning & when they wish to talk they bring a book with them to my desk at recess or noon hour to have me explain something to them, then talk about other things as soon as I answer their book question. Sometimes they come up close beside me & even put their hand or elbow on my shoulder if no one is looking & quickly remove it if someone approaches or turns towards us. Why do they do this? Why do they bring me bouquets and fruit?”

By late August, Jeff’s diary reflected Mary’s growing attachment toward him. On the 28th, the Creighton family had a large gathering of friends. Jeff noted: “After we had eaten we took a moonlight stroll & made up for lost time & she was more loving than ever before. This was the first time we had been together alone for seven weeks & she had begun, as it seemed, to realize that affairs were different when I paid her no attention from what they were when I was often with her.

"We passed quite a goodly portion of the evening together promenading & "swinging on the gate" & having a good time together generally & as we generally did when together & as young lovers generally do when no one is near. She seems to enjoy loving & petting as much as I do & we surely enjoy ourselves together.

"After we had thus had our feast of hugging and kissing as long as we thought we would not be missed by the crowd, we returned to the house & tried to help others to be happy."

"Swinging on the gate" became one of their favorite meeting spots as an entry on Oct. 3 explained. "This gate is quite a distance from the house & the walk is thickly bordered with bushes & plants of various kinds & when at the gate those at the house could not see us hug & kiss & be afraid we would overdo the matter so that was a favorite resort for us. When we had talked over what we wished to privately & had a sufficient love feast we returned to the house & had some music."

Jeff continued to change school jobs, noting on Oct. 29: "I took charge of the Center District school at \$80 per month."

On Nov. 1, Mary was accepted as the musical instructor for Professor Merriman's Vacaville Peoples School after her father had given his permission in writing. He and Jeff then helped to move her piano to the school.

Mary's new job allowed the couple to walk to Vacaville on a regular basis. One of Jeff's entries on Nov. 16 illustrates a few aspects of his bachelor lifestyle.

"Accompanied Mary to Vacaville on foot. I stopped at the Depot to see Davis & he told me Mr. Bingham had left word for me to commence school in their District the first Monday in December at \$80 per mo. Came back home & marked some of my clothes with ink which I bought for 25 cents.

"Took my dirty clothes to the first china house. Mary came home late, lovely as ever & was pleased to know I was to have the school."

November also found Mary still agonizing over her former fianc , John McMahan. She was in contact with him, trying to get her letters back. Despite recognizing that her father's refusal to let her wed John was based on John's unsteady character, she still harbored feelings for him.

She discussed her mixed emotions with Jeff on Nov. 18: "After the company had gone, Mary & I were left in the front room alone & were seated in the opposite corners of the room. Neither spoke for some time. As twilight shades gathered round, I asked Mary if she was building air-castles. She said no, she had passed that stage. 'Then what are

you thinking? Please tell me?' She stated something about the company. I took a chair & sat beside her & put my arms around her & offered to kiss her as usual, but she was not of the same notion & I asked her why she did not kiss me as usual. She hesitated. I asked her to kiss me first & then tell me why she did not kiss me. She smiled at the notion. I begged her to tell me why she is so indifferent so suddenly. She said I knew why. I asked her not to talk in such a roundabout way for I never hesitated to tell her, she is my choice. She then stated that she had promised John McMahan that she would be true to him & she was not making her word good. Told her I did not wish to interfere with the happiness of anyone else but that I had a great deal more regard for my happiness than I had for John's & I preferred she would consider me her choice. I asked her if she still had a lingering hope of reconciling her parents to her marrying John. She said she had if he came out all right. 'I presume then, you intend to get John if you can & if not, then you will turn to me?' I replied. 'No,' she said, 'I'll not make you second choice,' and at this she freed herself from my arms & straightened herself up in the chair. I then stated to her that she is no second choice of mine but is the first & foremost in my affections & saying this I drew her to me & enfolding her in my arms as our lips met with a volume of meaning."

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