

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Pierson B. Reading, although a western pioneer, was born into a nation which essentially comprised the Atlantic seaboard east of the Appalachian Mountains. Born on November 26, 1816 into the home of Pierson and Charity Reading, Pierson Reading by birth gained the stature of kinship to a family distinguished in New Jersey leadership since before the Revolutionary War. The Reading family was of English stock, dating back to Robert de Reading of Westminster in the 1300's. The founder of the New Jersey family was Col. John Reading, an emigrant of 1684 and a leading early citizen of the province. As a large land-owner and surveyor, John Reading represented the citizenry of Gloucester County in the most important county elective office of that period - clerk and recorder. In addition, he served as a member of the Provincial Assembly after that body was created in 1681. This distinguished emigrant produced a son and daughter. His son, likewise named John, was equally influential in public affairs. Also a surveyor by occupation, the son, John Reading left his name on the first list of Trustees of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) and in 1757 began a short tenure as governor of the province. Governor Reading produced ten children. One of his sons, Joseph, in turn served the citizens of New Jersey as Judge of the Court of Common Pleas and as a Captain of Militia in the Revolutionary War. The father of Pierson Barton Reading, a son of Joseph Reading, married twice. His first son by his second wife, Charity Guild, who was a widow, was to become the pioneer settler of Shasta County.

Very little is known of the youthful years of Pierson Reading. The California State Library in Sacramento contains his school copy book from 1826, when at 10 years of age he was recording admonitions such as "Repent of your sins", "Attend to instruction", "Avoid all evil company", and "Initiate good action" in a bold and flourishing hand. Poetry with a moral bent was also inscribed by young Reading on the pages of this book. One such poem declared:

Set all concerns on virtue, fix your eyes.
And vice with all her tempting baits despise
These rocks like a wise pilot learn to know
And laugh at giddy fortunes gaudy show.

Although of comparatively shortlived duration, his education was obviously effective. Pierson Reading's knowledge of geology, surveying, math and history displayed in his subsequent letters and journals bears evidence to this effectiveness. His boyhood until age 14 was spent in New Jersey, where Reading received religious instruction in a Presbyterian Sunday school.

At age 14, this adventuresome young man left his New Jersey home and proceeded to seek his fortune in the south, undoubtedly motivated not only by a spirit of wonderlust, but by the practical need for self support evident in a large family containing three sets of children. Going to live with cousins, he was initially successful as a cotton

broker in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and subsequently involved as a commission merchant in the New Orleans market. Pierson Reading remained in the south until 1843. There he married and witnessed the birth of a daughter, Jeanette. Both financial and personal success characterized his life until his young wife died and his business partner absconded with \$60,000, leaving Reading bankrupt. These setbacks prompted 26 year old Pierson Reading to leave New Orleans and migrate west with a banker friend, Samuel Hensley.