

EPILOGUE

"Life," a wise man once said, "is not a matter of duration, but donation." Although his life was comparatively short, Pierson Barton Reading left his imprint on California in general and on Shasta County in particular. His accomplishments are noteworthy. Early emigrant to California. Second in command to John Sutter at a time when Sutter's Fort stood as a city of refuge for the tide of American emigrants arriving on the golden shore. Recipient of Mexico's northernmost California land-grant and pioneer settler in what would become Shasta County. Significant leader in the important struggle that wrested California from Mexico and placed it in American hands. Protector and confidant of the Indians of Shasta County. Gold finder and trail blazer in Shasta and Trinity counties. Nearly governor of California. A leading businessman and farmer in northern California. Devoted husband and father. A man of imposing appearance -- about six feet tall and 180 pounds.

Yet a list of accomplishments and achievements does not suffice to appraise the life of P. B. Reading. As one peruses his diary and the comments of his friends and family, one is impressed that here is a man recognized widely as a leader among men, a man of moral and spiritual quality that commanded the respect and consideration of his fellows. One biographer said about him:

"Pierson Barton Reading was clearly a man of superior qualities of personality; a distinctive individual of high native intelligence, dignified bearing, kind and tolerant disposition, and of unusual modesty and reserve. In an age of crude and raw morals and manners, he kept a clean, untarnished character, yet without prudery or assumption of superior worth. He lived and moved in the midst of a rough frontier life but lost nothing of his native refinement and courtesy. Men of sordid passions and men of the strictest honor alike held him in high esteem and valued his friendship and opinion. Throughout his days he enjoyed a wide popularity among his contemporaries."

Pierson B. Reading recognized his own needs and spoke of them openly. He indicated that the difficulties of his journey west had developed "fortitude and patience" within him. He accepted the Whig nomination for governor reluctantly, admitting a "feeling of diffidence in my ability properly to discharge the high trust of governor." He repeatedly expressed to his wife and family his need for their strength and care. Mr. Reading likewise emphasized his need for spiritual succorance by lamenting his families inability to participate in formal worship because of the remoteness of their location. Nevertheless, as men appraised his life, their commentary was most respectful. Dr. J. E. Stockton wrote: "I never met a man, that to my notion, was made of finer material in every sense of the word." Thomas Larkin called him "a man of worth and respectability." The volume, "Representative and Leading Men of the Pacific", appraises him as "of enlarged views and of a highly cultivated mind united with...character and most dauntless

bravery." The historian Hubert Howe Bancroft described him as "a man of well balanced mind, honorable energetic and courteous," while his friend of many years and experiences, John Bidwell, declared that: "Reading enjoyed the reputation of being a high-minded and outright citizen."

Today few physical reminders are left to indicate the significance of this Shasta County pioneer. On a knoll a short distance from the "Mansion" site is a small enclosure marking the final resting place of P. B. Reading. The home where he lived and from which he commanded the vast acreage of the Buena Ventura is now gone, and only a marker erected by the State in 1968 notes its location. Yet the legacy of this courageous and influential pioneer remains upon the County and the State he helped to build.