

CHINA TRADE DAYS IN CALIFORNIA



Edited by D. Mackenzie Brown

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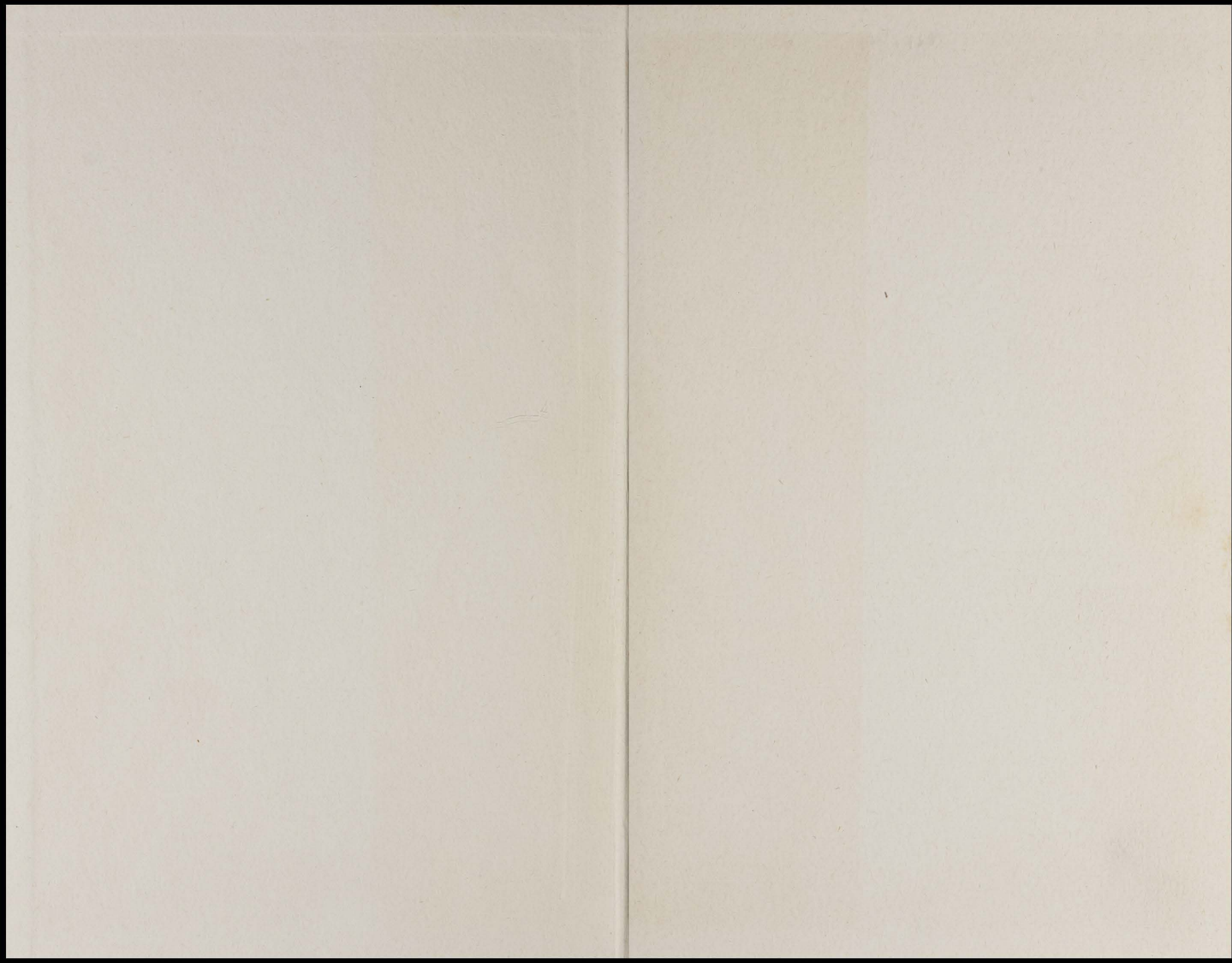
D. MACKENZIE BROWN

From the Thompson Papers in the possession of the Santa Barbara Historical Society—papers which include a rich body of correspondence and documents on the Pacific maritime life of the Thompson family, dating from 1821 to 1869—the editor of the present volume has selected twenty-five of the more revealing and colorful of the letters, and presents them with explanatory commentaries and notes.

These letters, says Robert Glass Cleland, the historian, "are of unusual historical importance. They give intimate details of many of the leading figures of California history, they portray the life of the province vividly and realistically, they furnish an excellent picture of the ramifications and technical aspects of the commercial transactions of the time; but their chief value lies in the light they throw

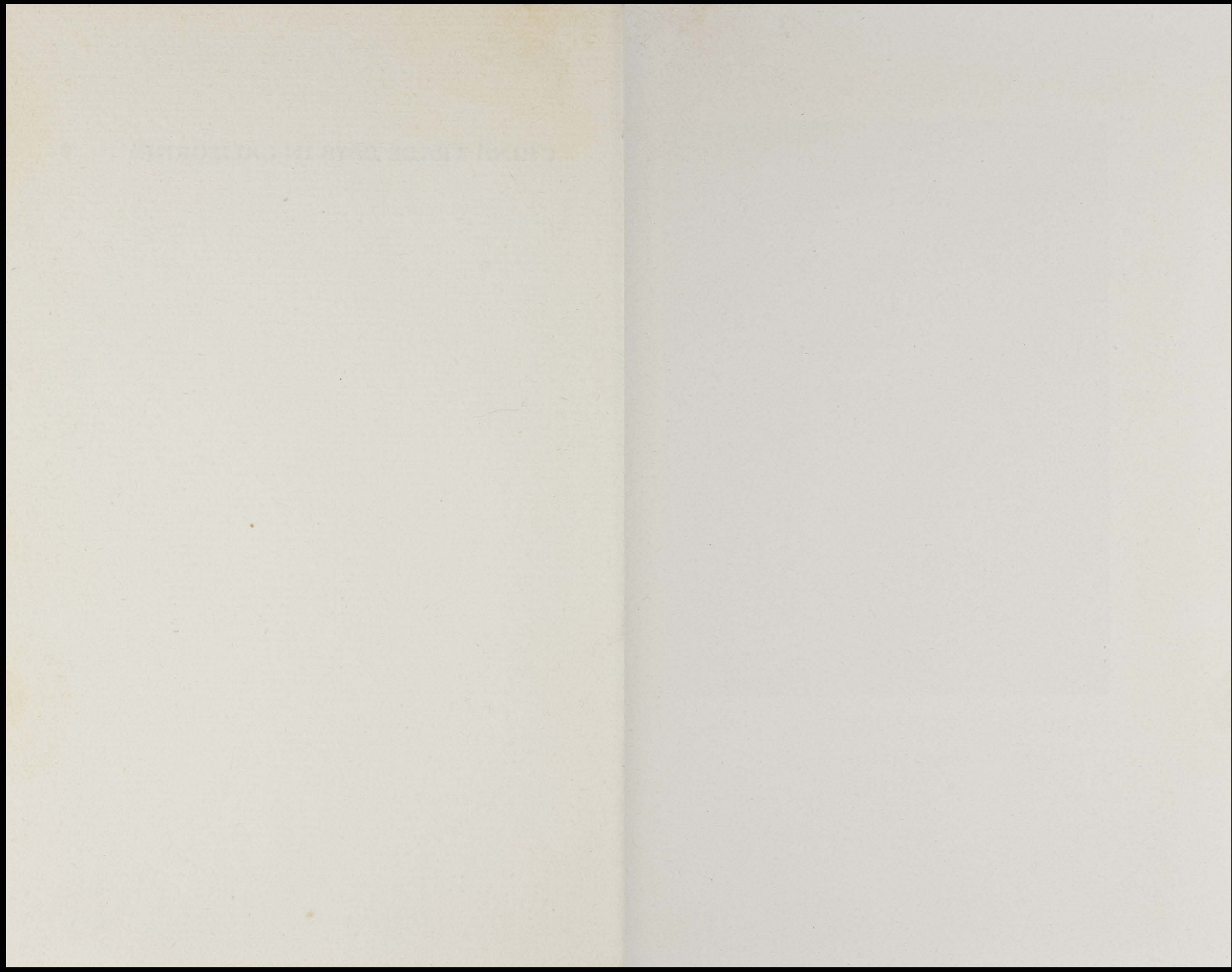
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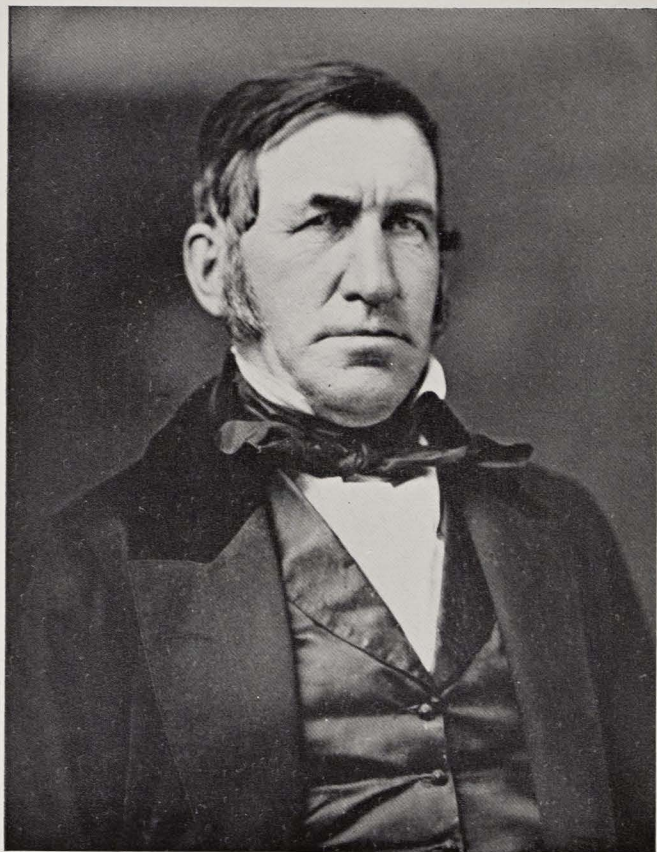






CHINA TRADE DAYS IN CALIFORNIA





ALPHEUS B. THOMPSON

CHINA TRADE DAYS IN CALIFORNIA

Selected Letters from the Thompson Papers, 1832-1863

Edited by D. Mackenzie Brown

With a Foreword by Robert Glass Cleland



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To
MY FATHER

Foreword

THREE YEARS after the close of the Revolutionary War, when American ships were "vexing strange seas with their industry," the Empress of China sailed from New York for Canton. This voyage began the historic trade that later played so large a part in the development of American interest in the Far East and in the creation of friendly relations between the United States and China. A little more than a quarter century later, Captain Ebenezer Dorr, in command of a Boston ship named the Otter, entered Monterey harbor and thus gave the United States its first direct contact with California.

From the voyage of Captain Dorr, New England merchants learned that rich cargoes of sea otter skins could be obtained on the California coast and sold at great profit in the Chinese market of Canton. The trade thus begun became an integral part of the larger transpacific commerce initiated by the Empress of China—a trade that widened the concept of American destiny.

San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and a hundred harbors which most Americans heard of for the first time when their sons stormed the coral beaches of the South Pacific in World War II, were all ports of call to the New England vessels of the early nineteenth century. The link between California and Oahu, "the crossroads of the Pacific," was especially close, and the adventurous, profit-

seeking sons of New England who dominated the three-cornered trade between the Atlantic seaboard, California, and Canton, molded the destinies of both countries.

When the trade in sea otter skins declined after the War of 1812, the hides and tallow of California cattle offered a new field for commercial exploitation. Here, again, the "Boston ships" soon took the lead, and New England merchants became the dominant factor in the new trade as they had been in the old. Like the seamen of Elizabeth's heroic age, New England merchant-adventurers visited the far corners of the globe and took seisin of the commerce of the world.

The letters published in this small volume are of unusual historical importance. They give intimate details of many of the leading figures of contemporary California history, they portray the life of the province vividly and realistically, they furnish an excellent picture of the ramifications and technical aspects of the commercial transactions of the time; but their chief value lies in the light they throw upon the historic China trade and the emphasis they give to the national and international aspects of California history of the pre-American period.

Alpheus Basil Thompson, whose letters constitute the larger part of this volume, became almost a tradition in the local history of Santa Barbara. Like Abel Stearns, Juan Temple, Alfred Robinson, and other early New England settlers, Thompson married into an influential

California family and intimately identified himself with the people and fortunes of his adopted land.

Thompson's father-in-law, Carlos Antonio Carrillo, was one of the most distinguished citizens of Santa Barbara—soldier, ranchero, legislator, administrator, California representative in the Mexican National Congress, and governor of the province—if only for a very brief and stormy time.

Thompson's letters fortunately continued for some years after the annexation of California by the United States and throw a good deal of light upon the revolutionary changes and chaotic conditions that resulted from the Gold Rush and the Federal Land Act of 1851. Thompson's comments upon American policy and the economic effects of the mining boom are especially valuable since he saw them, at least in part, through the eyes of an adopted hijo del pais.

Dr. Brown has made an excellent selection of the material at his disposal, for the letters are at once illuminating, representative, and diversified. His introductory paragraphs are clear, concise, and adequate—a combination never easy to attain. His footnote material properly supplements the correspondence without becoming top-heavy or excessive. In short, the book makes a distinctive contribution both to the historical literature of California and to the source material of Pacific trade.

ROBERT GLASS CLELAND

FRANCIS ALEXANDER THOMPSON was born in Topsham, Maine, June 27, 1807, the last of a family of ten children which included four sea captains. Dana wrote, "He was a man to 'toe the mark,' and to make everyone else step up to it. During all the time I was with him, I never saw him sit down on deck. He was always active and driving, severe in his discipline, and expected the same of his officers." He died July 14, 1837, at Penang.



FRANCIS A. THOMPSON

Preface

THE THOMPSON PAPERS from which the twenty-five letters included in this volume have been selected came into the possession of the Santa Barbara Historical Society in 1945 by the will of one of its members, the late Mildred Lacy Williamson, grandniece of Alpheus B. Thompson. The papers contain a rich body of correspondence and documents on the Pacific maritime life of the Thompson family, dating from 1821 to 1869. Although some of the material has been cited by Adele Ogden in her excellent account of the California sea otter trade, and by others,¹ the correspondence itself has not been published. Because of the importance of the material in the historical literature of this period of California's political and economic life, the more revealing and colorful of the letters have been chosen for editing. The correspondence has been arranged chronologically and the commentaries preceding each letter have been made as brief as seemed permissible for an understanding of the text.

The following persons have given advice and assistance: Dr. William H. Ellison, of the University of California, Santa Barbara College; Dr. Robert G. Cleland, of

¹ Adele Ogden, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784-1848* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1941); Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M., *Santa Barbara Mission* (San Francisco, 1923); O. H. O'Neill, ed., *History of Santa Barbara County* (Santa Barbara, 1939).

the Huntington Library, San Marino; the Rev. O. A. Villa, S.J., of Our Lady of Sorrows Church, Santa Barbara; and the Rev. Joseph Thompson, O.F.M., of St. Joseph's Church, Los Angeles, a grandson of Alpheus B. Thompson. Acknowledgment is also due the Huntington Library for its courtesy in making available the Stearns Papers and granting permission to quote from certain of the letters in that collection, and to the staff of the Bancroft Library for assistance in locating Thompson references. I appreciate helpful response to my inquiries about Thompsons from the California Historical Society, the Society of California Pioneers, the New York Historical Society, and the Houghton Library of Harvard University. The Santa Barbara Historical Society provided a grant which has helped make possible this publication, and I am under particular obligation to the Society's Secretary, Mrs. John Russel Hastings, for her efforts in making available not only the Thompson Papers but also the daguerreotype of Alpheus B. Thompson and the original oil painting of Francis A. Thompson from which the portraits in this book are reproduced. Finally, I am indebted to Mr. David R. Brower, of the University of California Press, for discriminating criticism of the manuscript.

D. M. B.

University of California
Santa Barbara College
May 29, 1947

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Alpheus B. Thompson *Frontispiece*

From a daguerreotype

Francis A. Thompson *facing page x*

From an oil portrait now in the possession of the
Santa Barbara Historical Society

The drawing on the title page is of the brand mentioned in the
commentary introductory to Letter 22. Presumably, the "T"
stands for Thompson and the superimposed "C" for Carrillo.

The China Traders

BY THE CLOSE of the 1820's California had begun to feel strongly the influence of the China trade, and the following two decades were marked by the effect of the trade and the traders upon the pastoral life of the native Californians. Indeed, the Mexican War and the Gold Rush were, in a sense, products of the China trade, which directed national attention to the acquisition of California and brought an influx of Americans into this far western land.¹

Various movements and events had combined to bring California into the orbit of Oriental commerce. After the Revolution the Northwest fur trade had lured many American ships and sailors into the Pacific. As this enterprise declined in the early 'twenties, other objectives were found in California's ports; for after 1822 the mercantile restrictions of Spain were replaced by Mexican policies which offered a sizable opportunity for foreign trade. By 1830 the products of the vast ranchos, chiefly hides and tallow, were being exported in quantity to the Orient, the United States, and elsewhere. In return California received Chinese silks (the so-called Spanish shawls), combs, and other products. Sugar and tobacco, however, were at first restricted.²

This new China trade was by no means a mere ex-

¹ For notes see pages 79-87, below.

change of China tea and silk for California hides or fur. A complex system involving the products of the United States, Europe, China, the Pacific Islands, California, and the Spanish Main was in operation. Ship manifests of the period show cargoes comprising such varied items as camphor, claret wine, castor oil, shovels, saucers, Canton shoes, striped pants, lacquered writing desks, and Chow Chow fireworks.³ Oahu, in the Hawaiian Islands (then called the Sandwich Islands), was a natural center for this trade, and the most important pioneer trading firm there was that of Wildes and Marshall, established by a group of Yankees which included Dixie Wildes, an uncle of Alpheus Thompson.

Santa Barbara was a leading source of hides and tallow and a major port in those days, along with Monterey and San Diego. When the Thompsons of Topsham, Maine, arrived in Santa Barbara in the early 'thirties, they found a quiet community whose life revolved about the Mission and whose sustenance came from the rolling hills of the ranchos granted the first families by the Spanish Crown and the Mexican Government. To Francis Alexander Thompson, Santa Barbara was merely a port of call. To his brother Alpheus, it was a headquarters for trans-pacific trading activities. Moreover, he married there, and to the end of his life called Santa Barbara his home.

Alpheus Basil Thompson, whose letters comprise most of the correspondence in this volume, was typical of

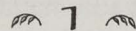
many Yankees who came to California directly or indirectly as a result of the China trade.⁴ He was born in Topsham, Maine, in 1797 and went to Canton in 1821 as a trader in China goods. By 1825 he had left Canton for Oahu, where he took charge of the business of his uncle's firm.⁵ From then until his marriage in 1834 to Francisca Carrillo, in Santa Barbara, he served as master and supercargo of several vessels in the trade between Oahu and California. After 1834 he engaged in various shipping and commercial activities of the Pacific trade. Partly as a result of his successful trading enterprises and partly through marriage into the influential Carrillo family, he became the owner of extensive properties and interests throughout California. Although from the time of his arrival he was thrown by circumstances into various political controversies, he was at heart a trader and his "excellent reputation for honorable conduct" was chiefly the result of his commercial career in California. He died in Los Angeles in 1869 at the age of seventy-four, survived by two daughters and four sons.

The letters in this volume date from 1832 to 1863. The first, from Francis Thompson to his mother, reveals the rigors and discouragements of the Yankee trader's life on the coast. The remaining letters—all written by or to Alpheus Thompson—may be divided into three groups. The first group, from 1833 to 1846, provides a running account of the family, business, and political life

of the Pacific traders residing in California under Mexican rule. The second, from 1850 to 1855, tells of the transformation and problems introduced by the Gold Rush and American occupation. The letters from 1861 to 1863 describe the impact of the Civil War upon the politics of the state and suggest the revolutionary economic changes yet to come. The Civil War may be said to mark the end of the days of China trade, for the full force of the overland westward movement was released at its close, and the influence of overseas trade was for the time at least subordinated. The next to the last letter speaks appropriately enough of the completion of the telegraph to California.

Among the men who came with the China trade and stayed to prosper by the developing population and markets of California, Alpheus Thompson was not alone in his choice of a California bride. Each of the five surviving daughters of Don Carlos Antonio Carrillo of Santa Barbara married an American.⁹ Here was the amalgamation of a California family with the Yankee immigrant a generation before the Gold Rush.

The Letters



Francis A. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Mrs. Lydia Thompson⁷
Topsham, Maine

October 27, 1832

The following account of the voyage round Cape Horn in mid-winter conveys something of the hardships endured by the men who came to California in the early trade. Difficult at all seasons, passage of the Horn held especial terror for the crews in winter (July, August, September). Francis A. Thompson will be recognized as the master of the brig *Pilgrim* in *Two Years Before the Mast*.

Thompson wrote the letter when he was twenty-five, while in command of the *Roxana* on his first voyage in the West Coast trade. Dana described him as a "vigorous energetic fellow . . . made of steel and whalebone" and quoted in part his speech to his crew at the start of the *Pilgrim's* voyage in 1834, as follows: "If we pull together you will find me a clever fellow; if we don't you will find me a bloody rascal."⁸ We need not recount Dana's impressions of his master as a brutal disciplinarian. The letter's bitter criticisms of the missionaries is in keeping with the character portrayed in Dana's book. Yet Thompson's concern for his family and crew reveal an aspect of the man that Dana lacked opportunity to see.

Dear Mother,

By the first opportunity I hasten to inform you of my safe arrival at this place after a tedious passage of 192 days! I had hard luck the whole passage and especially off Cape Horn. For five weeks I was beating and bang-

ing off that horrid place. It seems as though all the furies of the infernal region were let loose. Tremendous gales, snow and hail continually, night eighteen hours; sun nine degrees high and sometimes not see him for a week. A small vessel, all hands wet continually, and no chance to dry their clothes. Any person thinking there is pleasure in going to sea, I would advise them to double Cape Horn the season I did; I think they would change their opinion. I lost my carpenter off there; poor fellow, fell from the M[ai]n topsail yard and broke his head and neck; died in about ten minutes. He was an Italian, we shipped him in Leghorn in the Candace; was a very steady, trusty man. It required all my energy to keep my crew from giving out; continually making and taking in sail, small vessel, under water most of the time, wet and cold, a bad prospect, and no signs of a change; was enough to discourage most anyone. A brig a short time before from Boston bound here had her decks swept and had to put back to repair. I stopt at the Island of Juan Fernandez for water and got ashore but fortunately got off again without damage. It seems the *D—l* has had the whole management ever since I left Boston. It is a hard expression but I can't help it. Alpheus, it appears, has not gone home yet. I saw a Gentleman that was on board and dined with him 4th of July; he was then collecting furs on this coast, and by all accounts was making a great voyage. He is now at the Sandwich Islands I suppose. By all ac-

counts the Pious missionaries are reigning triumphant there at the present time. A good example of what our country would be if those cropt eared puritanical Rascals had the management of our Government, as they have tryed to get by petitioning to stop the mail etc. About the time we landed those pious brethren from the Parthian, there were some Roman Catholic Missionaries arrived who were poor, went to get a living (& make prosolytes I suppose,) the same as ours did, and certainly had as good a right; those poor people after having lived there 2 years, by the intrigues of Bingham & Co were sent off the Island; landed in a desolate place not within 10 miles of any house & their things hove after them on this Coast!° All this is true without a doubt; those people who profess so much love and good will to all men were the means of oppressing, and almost exterminating another society because they had different forms of worshipping the Supreme Being. I am not in favor of Roman Catholics more than any other sect; I think they are all alike. Give them power, & a plain honest man would be put to the torture because he could not put on a long face and look as hyp[o]critical as themselves. It seems strange that in our enlightened country people are so blind as not see the deception practiced upon them. However every dog will have his day. Sometime hence they will be down & then they will cry out Persecution. One thing they have done or been the means of doing, which is, stopping the

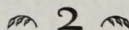
retail of ardent spirits that is a benefit to everyone & especially to Seaman in General. I had the fortune to have a mate that would drink 3 qrts. pr diem & then a person would not perceive it. I soon stopt it and allowed no liquor whatever to be used on board excepting off Cape Horn and then served it out myself. Although I never joined the Cold Water Society I would advise everyone that cannot use ardent spirits without abuse to put their name to it as fast as possible. No man that would keep sober long enough to mount its Throne ever would ruin himself and others by so degrading and beastly practice. When I shall return to America is uncertain. I may in a year & perhaps less time. The Ship California belonging to the same Owners will leave here for Boston in all Jan 7 and I think I shall get away soon after. There are several vessels on the coast and it is sharp work everyone looking out for himself. This place is like all others. Trade is most done by so many entering into it. I shall write Alpheus the first opp[ort]unity that offers. He may be on his way home. I hope he is. If I had enough to support myself decently in some Christian country I would leave the salt water to those who think there is so much pleasure to be taken at sea. However I had rather be a Sailor than a Soldier. The night before I left Boston I wrote a letter to you stating I had got a 1000\$ insurance on my property on board the Roxana. I left the letter in Dixey's¹⁰ room at the Commercial Coffee House not hav-

ing time to get the policy. Dixey said he would & forward it to you. If he did not I would you would have it done by some means or other, no doubt Capt. Wildes¹¹ will attend to it. This is a bad coast and I know not how soon I shall beach her. I am now selling my cargo & collecting Hides, which will be my return cargo principally. Harding Merrill¹² I have heard is Master of the Brig. Convoy. We young men down East can do something yet for a living or at least are not afraid to try. I sometimes wish I could live my Life over again at any rate I shall know what to learn my children. That is, what will be useful to them through life. I did not hear from Hannah¹³ before I sailed. I hope she got the Money Dixie & myself sent her. I should like to have young Calvin;¹⁴ think I could make a man of him or do better by him than he will be done by. I want all my Friends to prosper both rich and poor. In a Country like ours where there are so many blessings no one ought to suffer for the want of proper necessaries especially if they have relations able to help them.

I hope you enjoy every comfort this world can afford and that I shall see you again in good health and happiness.

I am your affectionate son

F. A. THOMPSON



John C. Jones
Bark Volunteer
San Diego, Calif.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

November 7, 1833

John C. Jones, of Boston, was United States consul and a merchant for many years at Honolulu, conducting a commercial business between the Orient and California. Later he married a sister of Alpheus B. Thompson's wife and settled in Santa Barbara.

The *Harriet Blanchard* and the bark *Volunteer* were vessels belonging to Jones, who is here preparing to return to the Sandwich Islands.¹⁵ Aside from his comments on the state of the California market for China and other goods, the letter is chiefly of interest as revealing the attitude of the California authorities toward trade regulations and smuggling.

Dear Sir

The Schooner *Harriet* is now ready for sea and I expect to sail in the morning if nothing prevents; The *Volunteer* is trading with hides, she will take thirteen thousand and I hope to be off by the 1st of December, Capt. Young goes in command, Mr. Ebbets also will go to Valparaiso; Mr. Peck takes charge of the small schooner and will remain on the Coast till the *Volunteer* sails.¹⁶ I have disposed of nearly all the cargo, and have good funds to take to the Islands. I hope ere this reaches you, you will have got through with all your difficulties and still be able to make a good voyage. Hides are plenty in the Pueblo, and no goods in the market, if you get there be-

fore any vessel, you can sell your cargo off immediately, Calicoes and cottons will bring any price asked. If you take Hides and contemplate to salt them, you had better get the House from Capt. Johnson which we now occupy, it is a good House and the vats are excellent—we pay 40\$ the month. If you do not bring Hides to the place, the vessel had better not come here at all, as there is little to be got; to the Padre of Lower San Maguel [Miguel]¹⁷ you can sell the vessel if you are so disposed; you must act quick to get rid of your cargo before the arrival of the other vessels; to the Missions of San Gabriel and San Louis Rey you can make good sales, be careful you do not oversell your manifest this side of Santa Barbara, all eyes will be upon [you], do not do anything contrary to the law or the least slip will be jumped at. Your Protests and other papers will be of great importance and I hope you will leave nothing undone, to enable us to recover heavy damages.¹⁸ A letter from you to Commodore Downs will be of great service, I have written very lengthy and strong letters to go by the *Ayacucho* and *Volunteer*, urging the necessity of his dispatching immediately to this coast one of the armed vessels; I have not the least doubt but he will do so.¹⁹ On my arrival at the Islands, I shall dispatch a vessel here as soon as possible and probably may come myself, if I can get a vessel capable of carry[ing] Hides I shall do so. We have many Hides here uncollected to the amnt of six or Seven thou-

sand Dollars. I have directed Mr Peck when he sees you or Capt. Nye²⁰ to arrange with you where you will secure the Hides we owe the Lorient, he shall probably prefer paying either at Santa Barbara or San Pedro. Should the Bark want anything from you by way of stores &c &c I wish if you have any for disposal to let her have them as we are quite destitute of everything. Not knowing how you are situated at the time, I am of course unable to give you any advice, nor do I feel that it is necessary, for I am certain that you will act for the best and do all in your power; I should be careful how I acted without the most mature deliberation and run no risks whatever, these people care for neither law nor justice and if they ever get you in their power, they will have no mercy, you will finde enemies all over the Coast, who will use every means to trouble you. The orders you gave me for collection and the note for 1000 Dollars of Bandini,²¹ I will give to Mr. Peck to hand to you or Capt. Nye. The schooner I shall order to stop at Guadalupe but fear the people have left. I have no news to give you from this quarter only that the Cholera is rageing in different parts of the Republic and the inhabitants are dying by thousands, it may moment[ari]ly be expected in this territory. [Three illegible sentences follow.] We have no accounts whatever from America. In Mexico all is civil war, no business.²² Canton goods of every discription a mere drug. Jimnez had sold his vessel and she had gone to Lima with

the Cargo. The Ivanhoe²³ stands a poor chance. I know of nothing more to add, only to wish you a safe deliverance from all difficulties, a successful termination to the voyage, and a speedy return to the Islands.

Very truly
J. C. JONES

3

Alpheus B. Thompson
San Diego, Calif.

to

Wildes T. Thompson²⁴
Topsham, Maine

March 18, 1835

Alpheus B. Thompson refers here to the arrival of the *Pilgrim*, with Dana on board, which touched first at Santa Barbara on its journey from Boston. Dana refers to Thompson and his bride at this time: "I pulled the after oar, so that I heard the conversation and learned that . . . the other who was dressed in the Spanish dress of the country was a brother of our Captain, who had been many years a trader on the coast, and that the lady was his wife. She was a delicate, dark complexioned young woman, of one of the respectable families of California."²⁵

Speaking of his troubles in building the "dwelling and stores," Thompson had written to Abel Stearns the previous year: "I had rather undertake to build a line of Battleships in the U.S. than a house in Calif. . . . I have succeeded in procuring all the materials and have them on the spot but the difficulty of obtaining help is great."²⁶ The structure was the finest yet seen in Santa Barbara and was the rendezvous of General Frémont and his officers in 1846. Later it became the St. Charles Hotel and remained at 805-807 State Street until it was torn down about 1920.²⁷

My dear Brother:

[Approximately ten lines of the opening paragraph have been torn from this letter] . . . Francis arrived the

14th of Jany at Santa Barbara in the Brig Pilgrim, well, and on the same day the Brig Lorient from the Sandwich Islands arrived Consigned to me.

I was Married on the 4th of November last²⁸ at Santa Barbara to Miss Francisca Carrillo of that place, her age is nineteen, have been attached to her four years. I have built a Dwelling and Stores at that place where I shall reside and do business for the present.

You are also married, may happiness attend you both, please present my Compliments to your Wife. I have wrote Mother by this Conveyance . . . [The missing lines here were written on the back of the section cut from the first paragraph] . . . but he will pay himself from the one thousand and send me the Bills and pay the balance over to Mother which I presume will be about five hundred dollars a little more or less, which amount I hope will be of service to her. I wish to pay you a visit soon and will as soon as possible.

Francis has more time than I have, shall tell him to write particulars, he is now at this place. I have wrote the above in great haste have not time to make a Pen or think of any thing more to say to you only that I will give you all the information I possess relative to affairs by Francis, but when that will be, I know not as the Voyage is just begun.

Yrs. &c
A. B. THOMPSON

4

Francis A. Thompson
San Diego, Calif.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

May 5, 1836

This was written three days before Captain Thompson, now in command of the *Alert*, left California for the return voyage of *Two Years Before the Mast*. Dana, of the *Alert's* crew, describes the cargo thus: "Our Forty thousand hides and thirty thousand horns, besides several barrels of otter and beaver skins, were all stored below, and the hatches calked down. All our spare spars were taken on board and lashed, our water-casks secured, and our live stock, consisting of four bullocks, a dozen sheep, a dozen or more pigs, and three or four dozens of poultry, were all stowed away in their different quarters; . . ." ²⁹

The "pleasant old codger" going home with Thompson is Professor Nuttall, of the "Chair of Botany and Ornithology in Harvard University," whom the second mate of the *Pilgrim* had reported to Dana as being "a 'sort of an oldish man' with white hair, and spent all his time in the bush, and along the beach, picking up flowers and shells and such truck, and had a dozen boxes and barrels full of them." ³⁰

The "capricious Mr. Robinson," agent for the Boston trading firm of Bryant and Sturgis, is the author of the well-known *Life in California* (1846). Dana speaks of him frequently. He married Anna María de la Guerra in 1836. She was known as "Anetta"—which explains the reference to "Anetta's bandbox."

The *Alert* and the *California* were owned by Bryant and Sturgis. Dana states that nearly two-thirds of California's imports from round the Horn were handled at the time by this company. ³¹

Dear Brother

I am now about leaving this Coast but must say am greatly disappointed in not seeing you before my depar-

ture. I have been expecting to hear of your arrival in Monterrey every day this long time, but have some suspicion that instead of your coming direct to this Coast, as you wrote me, you have gone to Manilla for a better assorted Cargo than can be obtained from Woahoo.

The Alert takes 39,000 hides 31,000 horns, between 7 & 800 lbs. of Beaver & is not deep!! What do you think of that for a California Cargo? If I can deliver it in good order in Boston & make a good passage, is the height of my ambition at present. But that remains to be seen.

I received your letter by Mr. Nuttall who goes home with me in the ship, which will make it rather pleasant for me on the passage to have such a pleasant old codger for a companion.

I am very glad you have got a more comfortable and better vessel to drive around the coast in—for drive you must if you come here this season as Messers Bryant & Sturgis are determined to carry all before them in this part of the world.

The California is arrived with a good Cargo & Assistant Supercargo, and another Ship is expected in a few months & should they not have unfavourable accounts from this Coast, it is probable the Alert will be sent back immediately. But it is doubtful if I come in her, *even* if I have the offer, which will depend altogether on the capricious temper of Mr. Robinson at the moment he wrote. I think there will be *fun* between him and his comrade

ere long, as it is impossible for a man to put up with some of his *would be* dignified ways at all times. Arthur³² is just right for him, for if R. [Robinson] tells him to carry Anneta's Bandbox he is just the one which will jump to do it. (God speed him say I).

I received letters from all our Friends who were all well. John³³ was living with his Cousin Isaac who was appointed his Guardian. They all want to see you & your wife very much & think you may return in the Alert. My wife wishes in particular to be remembered by you & has a great desire to see her new Sister. Old [Captain] Wildes wrote me. Wished me to make his compliments to you & your wife & hopes you have written him all the information necessary with regard the Schr Washington & other affairs.³⁴ He has bought a Ship of 400 tons but does not say what he is going to do with her. Some great private expedition I presume.

Wildes and Dixie [are] freighting, Wildes in a new Ship of 500 tons & Dixey in the Ship Avis. E. D. Peirce is trading in Brunswick &c. &c. Charles Hall³⁵ did not pay up what he owed me (as I always expected) & I took his note payable on demand & (*certainly* before I left St Diego) for (146\$) one hundred forty six dollars in cash (69) sixty-nine hides & left the note with Abel Stearns³⁶ for collection to be forwarded to St Diego by the California giving him the privilege of taking the hides at the Pueblo cash price & turning over the cash as

soon as recd. but C. Hall failed in his agreement & promise to pay—therefore I shall have to trouble you with an order on Stearns for the am[oun]t when he receives it, which you can either remit to me, or invest in any speculation you may think will be for my benefit. I shall expect to receive letters from you across land & wish you would enclose that list of a California cargo & I will assure you, *no one* else will ever profit by it except myself & likewise, should I get kicked out of employ, whether I could stand any chance to drive a vessel for you or your Partners, if I should make my appearance in these Seas again, which God knows I shall not, if I can do better, but it is best to look out in season.³⁷ I think you might find time to write longer letters than you generally do & as often as opportunities offer. hoping you may arrive safe here with a good Cargo I remain your Brother

in haste, F. A. THOMPSON

I wish you to pay Mr. Burke³⁸ seven dollars which I owe him for a box of cigars. The last time I was in Sta B [Santa Barbara] I forgot to pay him.

F. A. T.

N. B. I enclose a copy of my letter to Stearns³⁹ & an order on him for the amt of the note which he has in my favor against C. Hall.

F. A. THOMPSON

5

Thomas Shaw
Boston, Mass.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

July 25, 1836

Thomas Shaw was a native of Massachusetts who served as supercargo, clerk, and master of various vessels in the Pacific trade during the eighteen-twenties and 'thirties.

We find here a reflection of the chaotic affairs in Mexico at this time. Not only was Texas fighting for independence, but the death of Governor Figueroa had caused unsettled conditions in California. The American government's attitude toward the "proceedings of the Texans" was a divided one because of the potential role of Texas as a slave state.

My dear Sir:

I returned a few days since from an excursion to the falls of Niagara, whither I went by way of Sackets harbour, stopping at several ports on Lake Ontario; from Buffalo proceeded up Lake Erie as far as Cleveland, State of Ohio, & thence thro Pennsylvania & Maryland to Washington, from thence back to Albany, up to Saratoga & over the Green Mountains, thro' part of N. Hampshire back to Boston; I was highly gratified to find on my return a letter from you dated Jany 10th., by which you inform me that you was then at the S. [Sandwich] Islands with your wife, who I am happy to hear was pleased with the regulations there; the contrast to her must have been striking; by the by, how does she get on with her *English*; the *children too*, I suppose that all your

spare time is occupied in teaching *them* the English language, it is best to begin early & endeavor to make *Christians* of them.

I am afraid that the death of Figueroa will cause some trouble in the camp, at least it may operate to the disadvantage of those who have much due on the coast. I should like to know very much the state of things at present, I suppose you will have heard ere' this reaches you, that the Texans have declared themselves independent, they have had some hard fighting, the Mexicans at first having the advantage owing to vastly superior numbers, *Santa Anna* has proved himself a cold blooded murderer, by causing a detachment of four-hundred men (who had surrendered as prisoners of war after being surrounded by 5 times there [their] numbers, & terms of capitulation granted them) to be shot, they were kept a week & then marched out under the pretext of getting provisions, of which they were much in want, & there by the peremptory orders of *Santa Anna*, Shot down like dogs, three I believe only escaping; the case has not a parallel, he had threatened an extermination of all foreigners in Texas, & all who had espoused their cause but he is suddenly stopped in his blood thirsty career & is now a prisoner in the hands of the Texans, who will not let him escape, he had crossed the Brassos [Brazos] with about 1100 men, when he was attacked by Genl Houston with 600 men & completely beaten, about 500 of Sta

Annas men were killed & the remainder threw down their arms & surrendered; among the prisoners were Genls *Santa Anna* & Genl *Cos* with their whole suites. After the battle *Sta Anna* fled alone, disguised himself & was found about 10 hours afterward safely esconced in the branches of a high tree, there were only two or three in pursuit of him & when they accidentally discovered him they had nearly given up the chase, I believe that they were not aware that they had *Sta Anna* until they arrived at the Camp when the soldiers cried out el General *Santa Anna*. I send you a few papers by which you will get the particulars.

I am glad to hear that the 250 hides have been obtained from *San Juan* & I hope that the residue have been paid er'e this. I hope *Fitch*⁴⁰ has recovered the hides due from *San Luis Rey*, & also the debt due from *Juan Bandini* for which he has *Bandini's* Obligation payable in six months from April 13, 1835. The hides due from *S Luis* should have been paid as soon as August last, please give *Fitch* a jog with my respects. *Eugenio Arce*⁴¹ I know well, & therefore am not surprised that he should try to evade the payment of his debt of fifteen hides from *Elwell*,⁴² eight I believe were to be paid to *Mr. Burke*; I think I wrote to *Burke* concerning them, it was for hides he overpaid me. The news of the day you will gather by the papers. I hope that the Americans on coast will not meet with any trouble or vexations on acct of this Texan War,

but I must confess that things look Squally for the Mexicans are under the impression that the American Gov't. are countenancing the proceedings of the Texans, whereas the reverse is the case. Business has been brisk but money scarce, as high as four per cent per month having been paid, there have been but few failures, money is now easier now.

We are all anxiously waiting or hoping to receive letters from M Robinson, as not a letter has been recd from him by any of his owners or others I believe & it is somewhat surprising, as a number of letters have been recd by others from the Officers & others in the Ship; I think there is no doubt that [Alfred] Robinson has wrote but his letters have miscarried. I don't know that I shall ever come to California again, but it is *possible*; I have very little inclination for it at present. I do not dread the work, but the distance, but I cannot content myself much longer without something to do, as it [is] not congenial with my feelings. I could add more but have not time, as I am now under an engagement to go to Bangor, therefore you must excuse these few disconnected sentences.

Wishing you much happiness and success in your undertaking

I am very sincerely

Your friend & servant

THOMAS SHAW

P.S. I would just say that our voyage turned out full as well as I had expected.

6

Abel Stearns
Los Angeles, Calif.

10

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

March 4, 1837

Thompson was supercargo of the *Loriot* at the time of her seizure at San Francisco in September, 1833. This notorious incident led to a heated controversy between California's Governor Gutiérrez and Commodore Edmund B. Kennedy, who had come from the Sandwich Islands in a frigate to intervene in Thompson's behalf.⁴³ Alfred Robinson and William Heath Davis refer to the seizure in their records of early events in California.⁴⁴ The Davis account follows: "About 1833 the brig 'Loriot,' Captain Nye, arrived from Honolulu with a cargo of merchandise, A. B. Thompson, supercargo. Shortly after, orders were sent from Monterey to have the vessel and cargo seized, upon the presumption that full duties had not been paid.⁴⁵ Don Jose Sanchez was directed to board the vessel and arrest Thompson. He accordingly proceeded to do so, accompanied by a squad of soldiers. Reaching the deck of the vessel and approaching to make the arrest, Sanchez drew a pistol and aimed it at Thompson, who instantly struck it from the officer's hand and at the same moment knocked him down and jumped upon him. The soldiers came to Sanchez' aid and gave him protection. Thompson was taken ashore and imprisoned at the Presidio, where he remained for some considerable time. After his arrest the whole cargo was removed to shore, together with the stores of the vessel, and the sails were unbent and taken away. Finally an order was received from headquarters to release the cargo and other property of the vessel and to liberate Thompson, which was carried into effect. During the detention the cargo and stores deteriorated in condition, particularly the latter, which were also diminished in quantity."

Thompson complained to Abel Stearns, the following February, ". . . the detaining me here in the manner they have is in my

opinion the most outrageous thing ever inflicted on an American in these seas."⁴⁶

Thompson was confined for a time in Vallejo's house in San Francisco, but was released on bail by Judge José Antonio Carrillo at Los Angeles, after the former's brother-in-law, John C. Jones, had given bond pending a later trial. "Of final results," says Bancroft, "nothing is known."⁴⁷ But the following letter reveals a decision in Thompson's favor.

This is apparently the case referred to by Thompson in a letter to Stearns in 1835, as follows: "Should the case against me now pending in the Juscado of the city of Los Angeles (accusing me of being the owner of the Brig. Convoy)⁴⁸ be brought forward during my absence I wish you to meet it with a firm denial."⁴⁹

Dana's account in *Two Years Before the Mast* would seem to involve both the *Convoy* and the *Loriot* in smuggling operations: "The second day after our arrival, a full-rigged brig [later identified by Dana as the *Convoy*] came around the point from the northward, sailed leisurely through the bay, and stood off again for the Southeast in the direction of the large island of Catalina. . . . the brig was never again seen on the coast, and the *Avon* went into San Pedro in about a week with a replenished cargo of Canton and American goods. . . . Two days after the sailing of the *Avon*, the *Loriotte* came in from the leeward, and without doubt had also a snatch at the brig's cargo."⁵⁰

Abel Stearns himself was under suspicion at this time. His warehouse at San Pedro was investigated by a committee for the governor, but actual proof of contraband operations appeared to be lacking according to the committee's report.⁵¹

Dr Sir—

having understood that soap is a dearer article in Sta Barbara should like to send you a lot if sales could be effected at 18 pans to the dollar del'd there free of charges,

to be paid in hides or cash—(hides at 24) please advise me on the Subject.

I have obtained a final decision on your case relative to the seizure of the *Loriot* your imprisonment & that is the court has freed you from all Bonds and left you the right to reclaim damages costs & against those who caused the Seizure [five illegible words follow]. I should Send you a copy of the proceedings but Mr. Warner⁵² informs me you intend shortly to visit this place, therefore reserve it till your arrival—no news here

Yours very truly &c
ABEL STEARNS

7

Peirce and Brewer⁵³
Oahu, Sandwich Is.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

August 9, 1837

A firm such as that of Peirce and Brewer, in Honolulu, was in a strategic position to obtain China goods for California and the United States, to sell Yankee goods in China and California, and to handle California hides and furs. The China market for the last product was entering upon its final decline.

Dear Sir

Since our last of May 11 for the Schr. Kasiu we have had the arrival of our Mr. Peirce in the Brig Peru from Boston with an assorted cargo of dry goods.

We have lately purchased one half of the Brig. Grif-

fon,⁵⁴ which vessel will return here from the Coast in November, and should you or any of your friends wish to ship Hides this way, by that vessel, we shall be willing to purchase them for cash or goods: or should we be favoured with orders for goods, we will execute them to the best of our abilities.

The Griffon on her arrival back here, will proceed immediately to China, and return here with a cargo.—Should you feel disposed to give Capt. Little⁵⁵ orders for China goods we shall be willing to import them, at an advance, to be agreed on, either to be delivered on California or at this place. We intend to run her as a regular trader between this place, China & California, *provided* we can obtain orders for goods, sufficient to warrant such a trade.

The otter Skins are still on hand and are in good order—from Capt. Little you will learn the State of [the] China Market as it regards that article.

We have now on hand an extensive assortment of American, European & China goods, and should be happy to see you & your family here for return of the Griffon.

Hoping you will make every exertion to obtain the amount of the notes, due from Hinckley,⁵⁶ we remain

Yr. Obedt. Servts^s
PEIRCE AND BREWER

8

Stephen Reynolds
Oahu, Sandwich Is.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

September 16 and 26, 1837

Stephen Reynolds was a Massachusetts trader active in the Hawaiian Islands in the years 1833–1844. “He died insane in Mass. about ’53, having lost his property in a sugar plantation at the Islands.”⁵⁷

The revolution referred to is the comic-opera struggle between “Governors” Alvarado and Carrillo. Alpheus B. Thompson’s father-in-law, Don Carlos Antonio Carrillo of Santa Barbara, took the oath of office in Los Angeles on December 6, 1837,⁵⁸ thus laying claim to the disputed governorship of California, but Alvarado finally received official appointment from Mexico, at Santa Barbara, September 15, 1839.⁵⁹

The question of war or peace between the United States and Mexico refers to the friction growing out of the Texas struggle for independence. President Jackson had recognized Texas as a separate republic on March 3, 1837, Congress having refused Texan overtures for annexation the previous year. The Texas question was a serious one to Americans in California, since many had either married natives or become Mexican citizens, as did A. B. Thompson in 1843.⁶⁰ Writing to Abel Stearns in October, 1837, Thompson refers to the immediate possibility of war between the United States and Mexico over “grievances.”⁶¹

Sir:

Inclosed I send you account of Sales of furs in Canton last Season by which you will perceive the State of the Market to be against California prices. Also you have E. Grimes⁶² & Co’s account current—Showing Balance in

your favor, for which I hold their Note payable to you on order, which will be held subject to your order.

Business is very dull. Natives are very poor. Nothing doing to improve their condition. Decrease of population is very great. The Missionaries have proposed to the King Chiefs & people to give them One tenth of their produce, at present it has not been granted—no doubt it will be. "*The poor Suffering Missionaries*" have been put on short allowance by the "Board." H. A. Pierce told me, they were to be left "by the Board" in three years, to look out for themselves!

We are all anxious to hear how your Revolution gets on. That you have a good *Form* of Gov't. established—with an enlightened and honest Administration in the "full tide of successful experiment."

News has not reached here yet, whether WAR OR PEACE between U.S. & Mexico.

[Four somewhat illegible paragraphs are here omitted.]

We have no News from any quarter. Dullness pervades everything. For want of Business, altercation stalks forward and enters the mind, languishing from inaction, ready to receive any matter to fill the *Void*.

His Majesty's Sloop Imogene, 28 guns, H. W. Bruce^{es} commander arrived 28th to stop several weeks. The Peruvian Consul gave a splendid Ball last evening at the Folly—to all the *respectable Residents* and strangers. Of course you must know, I was not there. Great times may

be expected while the Imogene stays. You will hear all the gossip and scandal from Carter and others on board, for it would take six months to write it. As I am the *Black guard*, a goodly share is laid on my shoulders—believe all, and more too—my shoulders are broad.

You will have account sale Furs by referring to J. C. Jones Esq. Only one Copy has been prepared owing to the great quantity of writing on account of controversial matters.

If anyone at St Barbara, on whom I have demands, should offer you anything for my account DO NOT put them away, but pray receive, receipt & forward me the amount.

If I can render you any service or promote your views, I shall be ready to do so whenever required,

My respects to Mrs. T., Capt. Nye and any of my acquaintance who inquire after me.

I remain your
Obt. Ser.

STEPHEN REYNOLDS

9

Alpheus B. Thompson
Oahu, Sandwich Is.

to

Mary Thompson^{es}
Topsham, Maine

November 26, 1837

The following letter and that of January 10, 1840, give something of the life of the Yankee in the California-Hawaii trade. Thompson's professed intention of returning to New England to visit his mother is here reiterated. But the nature of the climate or the

press of business or the dread of the rigorous trip prevented his return. In the letter of February 23, 1853, we find him still telling of his "great hopes of again visiting my native place and of again seeing my mother."

My dear Sister,

I left Santa Barbara the first day of this month and arrived here the twenty first in the Brig Bolivar⁸⁵ with a Cargo of Salted Hides and Furs, shall remain here about two weeks when I shall again return to my Family with a Cargo of Merchandise suitable for the California Market. I left my Wife and Boy well. I enclose a lock of his Hair, cut from his Head when thirteen months old, he commenced walking when one year and one day old and at the end of one month had become a great walker. I wrote you by the Ship California which ship sailed from Santa Barbara the eighth of last month for Boston therefore I have but very little to write you at this time.

Mr and Mrs Robinson took passage in that Ship Mrs. R is a Cousin to my Wife. Captain H F Merrill is here and will Sail in the Bark Jones for New York in all next month.

This goes by way of Panama by a friend of mine and you will probably receive it in all February. Tell Mother to bear with me a little longer, I am anxious to see her as well as all the family. Please present my Compliments to all.

Your affectionate Brother
A. B. THOMPSON

10

Alpheus B. Thompson
Oahu, Sandwich Is.

to

Mrs. Lydia Thompson
Topsham, Maine

January 10, 1840

The "perplexed state of the country" refers to the rule of Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado, who led a revolt against Governor Gutiérrez in 1836 and served as *ad interim* Governor until November, 1839, when he received from Mexico official appointment to the governorship. Thompson no doubt had in mind primarily the controversy between his father-in-law, Don Carlos Carrillo, and Alvarado. As part of the general amnesty which ended the struggle, Santa Rosa Island was granted to Carlos and Antonio Carrillo in July, 1845.⁸⁶ Thus began the interest of the Thompson family in the Island; their activities are described in the letter of November 26, 1853 (Letter 22), and in the commentary introductory to it.

My dear Mother,

I left Santa Barbara on the 19th of November and came to this Island with a Cargo of Hides, and am now nearly ready to return with a Cargo of Merchandise for that Market, shall Sail in five or six days; I left my Wife and Children well; we have two interesting Children, Francis and Isabel and I long to be with them once more. My intention has been for a long time to pay you a Visit this Year, but owing to the perplexed state of the Country for the last three years, in Consequence of Revolutions, (which are now all Settled) makes it impossible for to

leave at the present time; the Government and People are indebted to me for a large Amount which makes it highly necessary for me to look after. I have had no letters from any of the family since June, 1838 but have heard from some of the Members by those who have chanced to meet them. Dixey [Captain Thompson] was the last one I heard from. I have directed Captain Charles Brewer to deliver to Wildes P. Walker⁶⁷ a few Articles for you in case he (Walker) is in Boston if not, Capt. Brewer is to write to you unless he may fall in with some one of the family. My health is excellent and my business profitable and it would add greatly to my happiness to be able to see you as well as the rest of the family and candidly hope the time is not very far distant when I shall be permitted to enjoy that pleasure.

The Bark Don Quixote⁶⁸ is hourly expected here from Boston by which Vessel I shall expect to hear from you. I have seen announced in the Papers the death of Uncle [Captain] Wildes. I hope the piece of black Satin in charge of Capt Merrill was not lost, but if it was there is no help for Accidents, there is not a piece now in this place. I have purchased one piece of black Nankin Crape and given in charge of Capt Brewer for you and have directed him to purchase some other Articles in Boston and send you. I have no time to add more at this time but will again write you on my arrival at Santa Barbara Via Mexico.

Hoping dear Mother you are still in the enjoyment of Good health and in the midst of happiness with those who remain around you is the Sincere prayer of your Obedient Son

A. B. THOMPSON

🌿 11 🌿

John A. Sutter
New Helvetia, Calif.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Brig Bolivar
San Francisco, Calif.

April 7, 1841

Captain John A. Sutter, of German-Swiss parentage, was founder and ruler of the famous New Helvetia Colony in the Sacramento Valley. The discovery of gold, January 24, 1848, at Sutter's saw-mill touched off the gold excitement that transformed California. Thompson's correspondence reveals a considerable business transacted with Sutter.

Sutter was able to supply many beaver and otter pelts for the China and other markets by maintaining in his employ at this time a gang of twenty hunters. He reports in a subsequent letter to Thompson that he anticipates "a better chance to do something in this business as the hunters of the Hud. & Bay [Hudson's Bay] Co. is gon[e] back to the Columbia River."⁶⁹

Dear Sir;

If you would oblige me by sending me as much salt as you can spare you will do me a great favor, for I am much in want of it. If you will send me in a full account of my debts with you, I will settle with you in or about the Month of August in Beaver or Otter & if I have not

enough the Ballance I will give you as a draft on Hiram Grimes⁷⁹ for at the Islands, but please send me as much salt as you can spare me for am much in want of it.

I remain Sir
Your Most Obt. St
J. A. SUTTER

12th

Alpheus B. Thompson
San Francisco, Calif.

to

John A. Sutter
(?)

April 13, 1841

The major international events referred to in this letter need little identification. Turkey and the Dardanelles were key factors in the European balance of power at this time. England's Lord Palmerston in this same year intervened to make Turkey's Mehemet Ali the hereditary ruler of Egypt and in return concluded an agreement closing the Straits to all foreign warships.

"The war against the Chinese" refers to the preliminary phase of the Opium War, when British forces under Admiral Elliot moved to establish a blockade of Canton. It must have been a source of gratification to Thompson that American trade continued to flourish during the conflict.

Sir,

Yours of the 7th Inst. per Mr. Ridley⁷⁹ has been received.

I am disappointed in not receiving the Beaver as promised as I have my remittance to make. You say you will pay me in about the month of August in Beaver or Otter and if you have not enough, the balance you will draw for me on Hiram Grimes at the Islands.

Beaver taken in the summer is not Good and Otter I don't want, neither do I wish for a draft on H. Grimes, as he has gone to the United States. I shall be happy to receive good Beaver and will not object to a portion of Good Land Otter Skins, but an Order on Hiram Grimes I cannot receive. I wish to have the Account settled in July if possible as I am closing my business here.

The two Casks you will please fill with Salmon and send them here if your Boat returns immediately, if not you will keep them until my return here which will be in June.

Enclosed you have Account Current to this date showing a balance due me of \$956.6 which you will please pay as early as July next, being the longest that I can wait.

Latest advice from abroad speak of the prospect of a War betwixt England and France growing out of Egyptian & Turkish questions. Also that England was prosecuting the War against the Chinese with success, were in possession of all the Forts in Canton River at the latest date and were to proceed to destroy Canton in a few days. There is not much doubt but Gen. Harrison is President of the United States.⁷⁸

I have nothing further to Communicate

Yours very truly

[ALPHEUS B. THOMPSON]

13

John C. Jones
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Monterey, Calif.

November 21, 1841

The dull state of business in Santa Barbara was in part, at least, the result of Governor Alvarado's executive order of January, 1841, which barred foreign vessels from the coasting trade and prohibited the importation of foreign sugar and other products.⁷⁴ Also, the drought of 1840-1841 had caused the loss of much livestock and some crop failures.⁷⁵ Drought was a serious concern for Santa Barbara in those days, as now. Alfred Robinson wrote of the conditions in 1833: "The year was nearly at a close. The season for rain had set in, but as yet none had fallen. The hills and fields were parched by the heat of the sun, and all vegetation seemed partially destroyed. Everyone cried for rain!"⁷⁶ Alpheus Thompson, in a letter to Abel Stearns in 1835, had at that time again referred to a great drought in Santa Barbara.⁷⁷

Dear Sir

I wrote you some short time since by the *Alert*, expecting that the letter would reach you in Monterey, I have since received yours of October from Oahu by the *Curacoa*⁷⁸ by which I learn that you will probably not reach the coast till sometime late in this month. I have nothing now to communicate, but only to repeat, that your wife and family are enjoying the best of health and comfort.

The old Man and Woman continue at the Ranch, tho I believe the latter, is soon to return. Everything is quiet in this place, but unusually dull and stupid; we have had a plentiful rain for two days, which has completely re-

freshed the earth, and nature has already begun to appear in her mantle greene.

We continue to sustain life by the greatest difficulty, those who are fond of beans can live, but such as require good bread and good beef, like myself, I assure you, find it difficult to support nature. I hope you will bring us a supply of flour and tea, as both articles are much wanted here and some small quantities would sell well as I presume they will also, in any part of the coast.

I hope you will not have brot many goods and such only as will immediately sell, to me, the prospect for business looks gloomy indeed—what you are to do for Cash in entering I cannot devise, the only hope I have is, that you will bring such articles as will command money, otherwise you will meet with much trouble. It will be dangerous indeed, I fear, to run any risk in entering. Depend upon it they will search every part of the vessel, not excepting your private trunks and the chests of the crew, the examination to the *Index*⁷⁹ should be a warning to us all, they are hungry to ketch some one of us, and will leave no means untried to affect it; fortunately, Pablo⁸⁰ is here, and the wretch, it is reported, is soon to be removed from office, God send him a speedy delivery. Larkin,⁸¹ I understand, is going to Mazatlan, will you find out how and when.

I have got old Mike here, with a view to *Guduloope* [*Guadalupe*],⁸² of which business I have the best opinion,

money is to be made there, if followed up. Fitch left here two days since, he will not leave for Mazatlan till late in January, he told me that the General said he did not intend to do anything about the Mill, as he had no notion of his building a house and you making all the profit. How true this story is, is hard to say, you can be the better judge.

Will you endeavour to get all the particulars of the proceedings of the Captain of the Curacoa, from what I can learn, it would have been much better for the foreigners, had he not come; I am very anxious to be able to write Baron all the particulars of the visit of the ship.

If you are in Monterey when the Yorktown⁸³ arrives, do, for Heavens sake, do something to urge the Captain on to require some satisfaction, for the injuries & losses resulting from the late unwarranted proceedings of the Executive⁸⁴ of this Department and satisfaction to every American Citizen for personal outrages whether by forcible detention or personal ill treatment.

I shall anxiously look for you early in the coming Month, and hope that nothing will occur to cause your longer detention from your family and friends,

With best wishes

Yours truly

JOHN C. JONES

14

John C. Jones
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Monterey, Calif.

October 2, 1843

The hunting expedition herein described was in quest of sea otter. San Nicholas and San Clemente are islands off the southern California coast, and the bay of Todos Santos is now better known as Ensenada in Lower California. The sea otter trade was nearing its close at this time. The poor state of the China market⁸⁵ has already been mentioned, but new markets helped carry the trade a while longer.

Commodore Lawrence Kearny had been sent to China in 1842 to provide naval protection for Americans and to prevent the use of the American flag by vessels engaged in the opium trade.⁸⁶ In 1843 the Hawaiian Islands were seized by a British officer in the face of a declaration, the previous year, by President Tyler that the United States would oppose control of these islands by any foreign power. Kearny on his return voyage from Canton strongly protested the seizure and Great Britain promptly disavowed the act.⁸⁷

Dear Sir

The ship California⁸⁸ sails this evening for the southward and I write you, tho there is nothing of importance to communicate. This will make the 5th letter I have written since you left all to the care of Mr. Larkin, and I hope they may not have fell into the hands of other persons. Since the last letter I wrote you, I have received a note from Captain Stevens dated 9th of September off San Diego where Canoes had left him and he was bound

to the bay of Todos Santos; at San Nicholas & Clemente the weather was very rough, but they succeeded in taking 21 Skins, principally Prime, Capt says the hunters and their men behave uncommon well and vie with each other who can do the best.

I am anxiously expecting to see the Ship here, as I cannot see what object there is to detain her a moment on this coast, if she does not reach the Island [Oahu] in November she will have [lost] all chances of any freight there, why not have her off at once. Dont forget to obtain plenty of Flour, fat, beans & the Cocoa, indeed you cannot bring a better article for sale here than Manteaca [lard]. Don José⁸⁰ sold the Bishop a bag last week for 3\$ Cash, there is none to be had here. If not all gone, you had better hold on to two or three boxes of Tea, there is none here.

We have accounts here yesterday from Monterrey that the Constellation,⁸⁰ Commodore Kearney is there from Canton & the Islands, which last place has been returned to the natives by Admiral Tomas. Do rake up all the news you can by the Constellation, I think she must have brot letters from Oahu. We hear that the Sch[ooner] California⁸¹ is to sail immediately for Mazatlan, probably under the pretense to get money and I fear the General⁸² will endeavor to put you off as to the bills untill his return, that of course you would not for a moment accede to. I would have the money c/o the Bills at the advance

of at least 40 per cent, from what I have lately heard of His Excellency I have lost all confidence in him; I think there is no use, longer to trifle with him, indeed it would be dangerous to do so, with a little firmness and resolution I think you will induce him to "come to the Scratch."

Dont forget, that the Brig [Oajaca] must have her launch on her return, before she goes to the Gulf. If possible do endeavor to have some cash here when the Oajaca returns we shall send at haste a thousand dollars.

All is quiet here; it is with the utmost difficulty we can get any meat or vegetables, indeed I never before, experienced such miserable fare, sometimes, I have apprehensions of starving. All your family are well. Mrs. Burton⁸³ is at the point of death she is not expected to live from hour to hour, she has received the extreme unction and last sacrement. Mrs. Don is here and all the rest of the family of Carrillos, a pretty mess of them to be here at the house of Don Tomas.⁸⁴ The probability is you will not again see Mrs. Burton she cannot hold out but a few days longer. Mrs. Wilson⁸⁵ has bought the Ranch of Victor Lemanes⁸⁶ for 3,000, one third Cash the other two thirds goods and hides, and, if I am not mistaken, she has bought a ranch without a perfect title; I settled with him your bill, making the discount in preference to taking an order on Wilson payable in Hides when he might see fit. It is surmised, and on the strongest

evidence circumstantial, that Victor is the Murderer⁹⁷ of the Mexican on the plains of Sn Antonio; there is no doubt but he will be arrested; if he is not the murderer there is no truth in the Science [of] frenology [phrenology]. I refer you to my former letters and in the hope of either seeing or hearing from you

Very truly yours
J. C. JONES

15

John C. Jones
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Los Angeles, Calif.

January 31, 1845

This letter refers to the revolt against Governor Micheltorena, who, as a brigadier general of the Mexican Army, is herein designated "the General." On January 13, 1845, he and John Sutter, with about four hundred men, pursued south from Salinas somewhat fewer than one hundred armed Californians under Juan B. Alvarado. Micheltorena reached Santa Barbara early in February, having seized some property on the march. The "civil war" ended in the capitulation of Micheltorena and his expulsion from California.⁹⁸

The letter's estimate of Caleb Cushing's success was borne out by events. The Treaty of Wanghia became "the basis of China's international relations until it was superseded in 1858."⁹⁹ Cushing, however, was not our "ambassador" to China, since the United States did not create the rank of ambassador until 1893.¹⁰⁰ It was not until 1857 that the first American minister plenipotentiary arrived in China.¹⁰¹ Mr. Cushing was simply a commissioner sent to negotiate a treaty with the Chinese, following the British example at the end of the Opium War.

Dear Sir

Captain Leidesdorff¹⁰² arrived here yesterday afternoon from Monterey and he tells me to day that he sails this evening for Sn. Pedro, there is nothing new at this place, all most all the men have left the town, the place appears quite deserted, the General is at St. Yines [Santa Ynez] expected here in three or four days, he sent a letter yesterday to the Bishop, Alcalda and to Captain of the Port saying that he had taken nothing from anyone excepting by paying for it, that he should molest no one, excepting those who were in arms against him and even for them, he had the best feelings and would not trouble them, if they would lay down their arms. I am very fearful he will make a stand here and begin to treat with the rebbel party.

I have got the order from Padre Antonio¹⁰³ for twenty fanegas¹⁰⁴ of barley but how to get it up is the difficulty, I think there will be difficulty in procuring horses here as there are but five people left to sell; will it not be well to ascertain for certain if there is water casks sufficient on board the ship and if not take some of those in the Pueblo. The Oajaca was not in Sn Luis on the 29th I fear something wrong has happened. I hope you will be able, at any rate, to sell the goods in Figueroas¹⁰⁵ hands, or obtain further advance, do the best you can. Not any news of importance from the Islands; Mr. Cushing the U.S. ambassador to China, had succeeded in making a treaty with

the Celestial Empire on the most advantageous terms. He went direct from Canton to Mazatlan in the U.S. Brig Perry which vessel, was at Oahu. The ship *Lin. & Washington* Packet with a full cargo of oil was wrecked at the entrance of Honolulu harbour, oil all on shore to be shipped home. Mr. Reynolds writes if the Ship had been at the Islands in November she could have got a freight of at least 12000 dollars. Brewer has a full freight secured for the ship *Ines* hourly expected all was trouble and confusion at the Islands. Leidesdorff says it is a perfect Hell there, Judd and Reord [Ricord]¹⁰⁶ in supreme command ruling with despotic sway. Governor Adams¹⁰⁷ was dead.

News has just reached Monterrey, as Leidesdorff left, that Mr. Rea [Rae]¹⁰⁸ at Yuerba Buena had blowed his brains out with a pistol, horrible, horrible. Doctor Den takes the oath tomorrow as Alcalda.¹⁰⁹

Very truly Yours,
J. C. JONES

16

Dugald Mactavish
Yerba Buena, Calif.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

May 12, 1846

The matter in dispute here seems to have been whether Thompson's hides were to be delivered at Honolulu or San Francisco. Dugald Mactavish was the agent sent to San Francisco by the

Hudson's Bay Company to sell the Company's establishment there and close out all business following the suicide of William Rae.¹¹⁰ The *Fama*, owned by Alpheus Thompson, was wrecked February 26, 1846,¹¹¹ near Santa Barbara, just off the Rancho la Goleta, after having come to the coast from Honolulu the preceding year.

The following excerpt from the Life of George Nidever¹¹² supplies some background for the Mactavish letters.

"In March, 1846, Thompson wanted us to make a trip up the coast, and fitted us out with a few supplies, telling us that we could get more at Monterey on his credit. Besides me, there was Fife and a man by the name of McCoy. McCoy had been mate of a whaler that was cast away at Monterey. He took passage for Chile in the 'Famer' [*Fama*], Capt. Thompson's ship, and was again cast away. The 'Famer' and the 'Vandalia,' a Boston ship, were both caught in a South Easter off Santa Barbara. The 'Vandalia' barely escaped, while the 'Famer' went ashore at Goleta just above Santa Barbara. Her crew were saved, but had she struck a ship's length further above, every man would have perished. The Capt. of the 'Famer,' Nye, was ashore in Santa Barbara at the time."

Sir

Yours of the 2 March last addressed to Mr. Forbes¹¹³ giving information of the loss of the *Fama* came duly to hand. I had however, previous to the receipt of your communication, written to Capt'n Wilson at Sta Barbara, requesting him to look after the Hides which the Hudsons Bay Company had on board that Vessel, at the time she was lost. Two days ago I had a letter from Capt Wilson stating, that you would only give up the hides on condition of his paying you, one hundred and Seventy Six

dollars and Seventy Six Cents, expenses incurred by you securing the Hides after the wreck of the vessel.

So far as I can understand the arrangement between you and the Agents of the Company at Woahoo [Oahu], with regard to the payment of the Goods you had from there, you were *bound* to deliver the hides at S. Francisco at two dollars each, without any extra expense to the Company. Mr. Forbes has informed me that you either could not or would not deliver the Hides to him, but as a favor to you he took Captn Nye's Bill of Lading for a sufficient number to balance your account, and allowed you a freight of twenty Cents per hide, which was a dead loss to the Company, as they did not wish their hides taken to Woahoo, and if they did, they Can be sent in their own vessels. This freight you cannot now claim owing to the loss of the vessel, but it would appear you are determined to make it good with interest by bringing forward a Bill of Charges against the Company for Securing the hides, which to Suit your Convenience were not received from you at S. Francisco and which ought to have been landed there free of all expense. This is a way of doing business, which I cannot understand, in fact I Can see no good reason for your having taken possession of the Hides at all—or refusing to give them up to the person I appointed as my Agent.

I have made an arrangement with Mr. Howard¹¹⁴ to receive hides from him here, in place of those now in your

hands, and I expect they will be delivered to his order by you without any further trouble, as otherwise I shall certainly take such steps as will eventually Cause you to be the loser.

I am Sir
Your very obed Servant
DUGALD MACTAVISH H B C

17¹¹⁵

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Dugald Mactavish
Yerba Buena, Calif.

[1846]

Alpheus B. Thompson was not a man to yield readily to threats. The reply to Mactavish not only denies the latter's assumption that the Hudson's Bay Company did not want hides in Oahu, but chides him for his lack of "appreciation" of Thompson's services. The final retort is a threat to spread the whole matter before Mactavish's superior, John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company and father-in-law of Thompson's friend, the late William Rac.¹¹⁶

Sir,

Yours of the 12th of May last has been handed to me by Mr. Howard Supercargo of the Ship *Vandalia*¹¹⁷ Acknowledging the receipt of my Note of the 2d of March to Mr. Forbes informing him of the loss of the Ship *Fama*.

You also state that you had previous to the receipt of my Note to Mr. Forbes instructed Capt Wilson of this place to look after the Hides which the H B [Hudson's

Bayl Company had on board that Vessel at the time she was lost. Two days previous to the date of the letter per Mr. Howard you had received a letter from Capt Wilson stating that I would only give up the Hides on Condition of his paying me, one hundred and seventy six dollars and seventy six Cents, my expenses incurred for securing the Hides after the Wreck of the Vessel. Capt Wilson presented me with an Order from you for the Hides (which Order instructed him to receive and ship them to San Francisco) and I immediately informed him that they were at his disposal or disposition, and inquired of him if he wished to remove them to his House, to which he answered that he did not, but requested me to render him my bill of expenses on the Hides which was done, after which, he, Capt Wilson Applied to a Supercargo of a Vessel then at Anchor in this place bound to San Francisco to receive the Hides on board on freight, observing at the same time that he must Obey Orders if he broke owners; the Supercargo however Could not make it Convenient to take them, at which time and ever since I have Considered the Hides at Capt Wilson's disposition and at the same time informed him that I should shortly want to make use of the Store House in which they were deposited. I have done business for a long time with several of the Agents of the H & B Company and have ever found them to be honorable Men; the late Mr. Rea Shipped a large Amount of Hides to Oahu in

the same Ship last Voyage at the same price of freight as then were taken for; he received a part of them from me in payment the same as Mr. Forbes did the Hides he Shipped. Had you in your Communication thanked me in the name or in behalf of the Company for securing the Hides from loss, instead of saying that you Could see no good reason of my having taken possession of them, would in my estimation been a much better expression as the Company had no Agent here at the time when the Hides were landed in Stormy Weather on a barren Coast. The Hides are at the risk and subject to the Order of the H & Bay Company or their Agent, they are paying or causing to be paid the bill of expenses rendered by me to Capt Wilson with additional Storage on said Hides after the first Month as is customary in Store Houses in this Country.

I shall embrace the first opportunity of Sending to Mr. McLoughlin a full account of this transaction with a Copy of your letter.

I am Sir
Your Obt Sert
A. B. T.

18

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Mrs. Lydia Thompson
Topsham, Maine

June 1, 1850

The transformation of California life from the pastoral days of hides and tallow to the frenzy of the Gold Rush is vividly told in

this letter of Alpheus to his mother. California had passed from Mexico to the United States, and the nature of the friction between the old settlers and the new immigrants is explained with a clarity and dispassion which are remarkable in one whose extensive titles were then in jeopardy.

My dear Mother,

I have received letters from Brother Wildes, dated, at San Francisco, accompanied with letters from the Family together with your Profile, which to me is perfectly natural and can perceive no material change or alteration since I last took leave of you; I have missed it repeatedly and it is now in possession of my Wife who sends her kind regards to you; My Children all look at it with pleasure, (Six in number) three Boys & three Girls. My eldest Son will visit you this year (Francis).

I shall leave this place for San Francisco on the 4th to see Brother Wildes.

Brother Dixey is at the North some five hundred miles from this place, at the Gold "Placer," his last letter to me was previous to the setting in of the Rainy Season, during which time all communication is cut off on account of the Rivers and Mirey Roads, the Rains in this Country are periodical; he was well at his last date. My Wife has been dangerously ill for the last month which has prevented me from seeing Brother Wildes, She is now nearly recovered.

I was at one of the Gold "Placers" last Year (not to dig Gold) on a trading expedition with eight Waggon loads

of Goods with which I did well, but have no desire to go there again, as the Mines are now filled with all Classes of People from all parts of the Globe, yet strange to say good Order has as yet prevailed and hope it will for the future.

The Gold Mines or "Placers" are very productive and will not be exhausted for Ages. Many of the poor Emigrants have become Rich in a short time, and many of the Rich have become poor in less time.

Gold is obtained by hard manual labor, therefore, he who cannot handle his Bar, Pick-Axe & Spade, Wash his own shirt, and Cook his own Provisions, better not go to the Gold Mines, to say nothing about building his own Hut and Spreading his own Bed.

I enclose you the Harbor Master's statement of San Francisco, of the number of Vessels and Passengers which arrived at that Port during a certain time; but during that term of time double that number have come in by land and are still pouring in, some of which have suffered very much, both by the Northern & Southern Rout from the States. Those from Mexico are near, they are well mounted on Mules and pack their provisions on the same class of Animals.

In this Port is a Vessel from New South Wales, arrived yesterday having on board over two hundred Passengers, bound for San Francisco, short of Wood, Water & Provisions of which they will have an immediate supply, but

when they arrive at San Francisco they will neither have House or home, and still two hundred Miles from the Mines.

When I was at the Gold Mines I sold my Flour by the quantity for One hundred and fifty dollars per Barrel and other things in like proportion; but there is no fixed prices for any Articles, the Roads are bad, labor is high and the distance great, but the Working Man can safely calculate on one Ounce of Gold per day on an average.

The great number of Emigrants from all parts of the World to this *Territory*, has produced a great change here, particularly in all eatables, as well as in labor of Men & Beasts. Foreign produce from all parts of the civilized Countries are pouring in in abundance, all of which sell cheap in the Ports, but the great expense of transportation to the Mines make them high priced to the Miners. Cattle, Sheep, Hogs & Horses are very high here; I purchased last Month twelve hundred and fifty head of Cattle in a Barter trade for twenty thousand dollars which I might have bought four years ago for five thousand dollars. and yesterday I was offered Cash twenty-two thousand five hundred for the said Cattle which offer I refused, as they will net me thirty thousand before one year, as fresh meats must be had. Lands, Buildings and house lots have gone up since the great rush of Emigrants to this *Territory* to enormous prices. I sold a dwelling House for the Cattle alluded to (in Barter) 15,000 which

cost me eight thousand dollars when built; therefore you can see the difference caused by the discovery of Gold, and not by the War with Mexico.

I wrote the Family last by Lieutenant Green,¹¹⁸ Son of Peter H. Green of Bath, I think in Sept. last. I am in the enjoyment of health, as good as any young Man might desire; I journied six hundred Miles last Month without much fatigue from this place to San Diego and back, My eldest Son being my Chief Clerk during my absence. You may think it strange that you do not hear from me oftener, but the fact is that since Steam has brought us so near together that it has actually been the cause of our further separation; before the Steam Ships commenced Running we had frequent opportunities by Sailing Vessels, but now all Sailing Vessels go direct to San Francisco and there the most part of them remain, the Officers & Crews go to the Mines and the Steam Ships touch only at the two extreme Ports in California, San Diego and San Francisco, and I am located half way or in the Center, and during the Rainy Season all communications to those two Ports are cut off by land in consequence of bad Roads & Rivers, but in a short time Steam Ships or Boats will visit all Ports in California when you may not be surprised if I pay you and my Brothers & Sisters an Evening Visit.

Having had a leisure moment I have wrote this Random letter, but will vouch for the truth of every word as

I never told you a fib since a School Boy. I shall be the bearer of this to San Francisco when I will add something to it and then you will have a fresh date that you may see how many days we are apart.

With much love to my Sisters & Brothers as also to all their Children, to Uncle Lemual and his Children; to all the Old Neighbors that are alive, to their Children who were my Schoolmates I wish kindly to be remembered to them.

I am looking forward in great hopes and expectations that a Stable Government will be speedily formed here that one can leave his possessions secure, but as yet there is no safety, every person must be on the spot to produce his own titles and *defend* them, or they will be lost. As a Territory like this purchased by one Nation from Another it is naturally supposed the purchaser owns the whole Country which in a Political trade is all right, but at the same time the Nation who sold the Territory stipulated certain Articles in the treaty that all grants of Land granted by the Mexican Republic to private Individuals previous to a Certain date that those Individuals should remain in quiet possession of the same. Therefore the Emigrants from the U. States have supposed they could come into these pleasant Valleys and take their choice of the Lands by paying the Government prices; but the disappointment has been great, as they have found all the fine Valleys occupied on the Sea Coast by us (the

old Settlers) leaving to the purchaser (the U. States) the Public Buildings and the Wild Lands which are not of much Value to Government or to the Emigrant. And now dear Mother I will leave Politicks and turn to Religion, and I sincerely hope we shall never differ on the latter subject, although I verily believe that during my travels through so many thieving Countries that I have been entrusted with more Keys than ever St. Peter was.

Wishing you health and happiness, with my sincere request, that you will extend my Kind Salutations to all the Family, I remain dear Mother Your very Obedient

A. B. THOMPSON

P.S. Frank¹¹⁰ has wrote you a hasty letter which I enclose; he can *Spell* well when he has a good Pen.

19

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Clara, Calif.

to

Charles Clayton¹²⁰
Justice of the Peace
for the District of
Santa Clara, Calif.

June 22, 1850

Thompson's statement in the preceding letter, "as yet there is no safety, every person must be on the spot to produce his own titles and defend them," was not without meaning, as the following request shows. After the American occupation of California there was much confusion over the true ownership of mission lands, particularly at Santa Clara, where American immigrants took possession.¹²¹ Padre José María Real was in charge at Santa Clara as

parish priest. Both the padre and his brother, who served at Santa Cruz, had unsavory reputations, which reflected unfairly on the priesthood in California. Titles to Santa Clara Mission lands that were sold during Real's administration were later pronounced invalid.¹²² It is very possible that both Thompson and Jacobson were victims of a swindle.

Respected Sir,

On my arrival at this place (Santa Clara) I found an Adobe building going up on a lot of Ground which I obtained from the R. P. F. Real in the year 1847. I have on enquiry ascertained that the Person who is having the House built, is a Mr. Andrew Jacobson,¹²³ and that he is not ignorant of my claim to the Ground but for fear he may plead ignorance I have to request you in your Official Capacity to advise him of my Claim to the Ground. You will please have this request Recorded and Oblige.

Your Obt

A. B. THOMPSON

☞ 20 ☞

Mary Thompson
Topsham, Maine

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

February 23, 1852

Mrs. Thompson did not recover fully from the dangerous illness mentioned in the letter of June 1, 1850. She died at thirty-five years of age, the mother of six children. However, Alpheus showed little interest in the New England widows and spinsters recommended so warmly by his sister. He continued to reside in Santa Barbara without remarrying, and died at Los Angeles in 1869.

My Dear Brother

Yesterday I was at brother Johns they had just received a letter from their Sone who had paid you a visit, he was much pleased with his . . . cousins. It is now a year since you lost your wife, and I suppose if you are like the down East widowers you are looking for a *help meat*, called a Wife, if so I wish you would come home this summer we have a plenty of *widows & spinsters* here that can be spared. I can recommend a great many of them, that would make good wives some are very much accomplished, they can Teach Music, French and English, to your daughters, and, *they* can Teach *her*, the Spanish language. I do wish you would come this summer, and not talk, about it, any longer. Mother thinks quite harde of you for not coming, but you know your own business best—her best love to you & Children, she is quite well for her, considering the colde winter we have had.

Our Friends, are all pretty welle, my health is very good in colde weather, I almost dread the change to warm. I have written to Brother Wildes, shall enclose this half sheet in his. My best love to your Children and accept a large share for yourself.

From your affectionate Sister Mary

🌿 21 🌿

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Mary Thompson
Topsham, Maine

February 28, 1853

The reference to the U. S. Land Commission in this letter clearly reveals the predicament of the old California families after the Mexican War. Under the Land Act of March 3, 1851, the original California grant holders were required to prove their ownership within a specified time before a board of land commissioners. The resulting uncertainty and litigation sometimes tied up land titles for decades.¹²⁴

My dear Sister,

Your letter to Brother Wildes and to myself bearing date of January 1st. 1853 has been received.

I have this day formally and legally executed to you a quit claim deed in and to all the Real Estate in the town of Topsham, County of Lincoln, State of Maine which was Willed to me by my Father Alexander Thompson for my own use and benefit after the decease of my Mother Lydia Thompson. The object of Selling my right and title of the above named property to you is that Mother with your Consent can sell the same and make use of the proceeds for her support, and that if you survive her you will be in possession of the balance.

I feel my dear Sister under many thousands of Obligations to you for the kind manner in which you have conducted yourself towards our Mother it is highly grati-

fying to me to know that one of the (Family) Children has been kind to our Mother for all of which you will be rewarded; at any time you should want some small sums of Money you will advise me of the same.

I wrote Sister Wilson¹²⁵ last year and enclosed her an order on B. Thompson Esq. of Kennebunk Administration on the Estate of Moses Thompson deceased for all Money or Moneys due me from that Estate, but as yet I have not heard from Sister Wilson; the amount I made a present of to her and recpt will be valid to the Administration for the amount due me.

My Son Francis will probably Visit you this Year, my intention is to allow him to leave here in April next, he will go to complete his English Education, but to what part I have not yet determined.

All my children are well except my youngest Daughter who is troubled with the Swelling of the Glands of which She has been frequently troubled since She had the Measles, a good Doctor is tending her and I have hopes that he will make a final cure. She is a very interesting Girl.

It is two years to-day since my Wife was burried, she was born the 28th day of Feby 1816, died the 26th day of Feby 1851, and was burried on her birthday: her Father Don Carlos Antonio Carrillo died the 25th day of Feby 1852 (he fell dead in a short time after he arose in the Morning, was one of the handsomest Men in the

State) her Mother Josephia Carrillo died on the 23rd of this month (Feby 1853) after one weeks illness, she had the care of my Children and set as much by them as a Mother could, they are now under the care of one of their Aunts.¹²⁸

We have two Coast Steamers from San Francisco to San Diego touching at all the intermediate ports which makes it very convenient. Wildes & myself hear from each other about every Week and Dixey W. Thompson is a very good Correspondent. Our Brother Dixey is in the North part of the State. Wildes received a letter from him a short time since, he was well. I shall go to San Francisco in all next Month and from that place after seeing Wildes will write you. I left San Francisco the 4th of last Month for this place, saw there Mr. Hugh Patten & Mr. Harding Merrill both were well and I should say by appearances were doing well.

I am well and feel myself as young as ever except my Eyes, the sight of which was never good, but now poor *indeed* as you will perceive by my writing, but have hopes of being able to obtain Glasses at San Francisco that will enable me to see clear and with ease.

I should have paid you a Visit last December but it would be the death of me to leave this Climate and go to Maine in the Winter, and in the Summer it is impossible for me to leave my business, but after Francis gets well planted down in some part I shall wish to see him

and carry with me some of the balance of the Children as Schools particularly English are scarce indeed, and it is not an easy task to teach Children the English Language where the Spanish is altogether spoken.

I have great hopes of again Visiting my Native place and of again seeing my Mother as well as those of the Family who may be permitted to live. As I am well aware that Age admonishes me that some of the members of the Family together with myself must soon be filed away to make room for our Children and I sincerely pray to my Heavenly Father that he in his tender Mercies may forgive us and pardon us of all our Sins and receive us as his Children to whom, and to him only we belong.

I controll a large Property in this State, but as the U.S. Land Commission gets along so slow, that it is hard to say when one can leave home, having to defend his Interests before them or relinquish them into the hands of the Squatters which I for one will not do. You will present my love to Mother and to all our Sisters and Brothers. Also my kind regards to Uncle Lemuel, and all our Cusins, to all our old Neighbors that were alive when I left and rest assured of my recolections toward my dear Sister Mary.

A. B. THOMPSON

🌿 22 🌿

Dixie Wildes Thompson
Island of Santa Rosa, Calif.

to

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

November 26, 1853

Dixie Wildes Thompson crossed the Isthmus of Panama to come to San Francisco in December, 1849. A gold-mining venture at Marysville failed and he eventually made his fortune in real estate in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. His bean ranch of 2,300 acres was said to be the world's largest. He is perhaps best known as the colorful and popular host of the Arlington Hotel in Santa Barbara.¹²⁷

Alpheus Thompson's wife was the owner of an interest in the Island of Santa Rosa, which had been granted to Don Carlos Carrillo in 1845.¹²⁸ It is second largest of the Santa Barbara Channel Islands. I find a recorded Public Statement of Alpheus B. Thompson in the Santa Barbara County Archives for September 16, 1853, which states that on August 29 and 30, 1853—three months before the following letter was written,—he “caused to be marked with the brand and ear mark of my aforesaid children [Francis Alpheus, Mary Isabel, Frances Caroline, Helen Ann, Charles Alexander, and Adalbert] on the Island of Santa Rosa one Hundred and twenty six cows or Vaquillas between the age of one and three years.”¹²⁹

The sad fate of the Island grant is revealed years later in a letter from Adalbert Thompson to his cousin John Dana, in which he tells of selling his title for \$1,000, advises Dana to do likewise, and says he believes that his brother Charles will dispose of his interest at the same figure. He concludes, “The Island has never yielded anything, could not sell to nobody but More, could not sustain an action and if More did not want to purchase it he could enjoy the possession of the same for a lifetime without interruption.”¹³⁰

Uncle Alphious

Sir, Mr. Kimball (on his second trip hunting) called here and tolde me you had not returned to Santa Barbary when he left; by him I am in receipt of San Francisco papers a box of Saleratus [baking soda], the rifle, a ball of wickyarn and for Louis¹³¹ a box of Sundries sent by Joseph; he has gone 'round to the other side of the Island, has promised to call on his return, take my letters and get some fresh beef; on his last trip I wrote to you directed to San Francisco which hope you received. You will not of course expect me to fill this whole sheet with news but be satisfied with the whole should it only fill a part. In the first place I have driven down two stakes in the range of the head of Santa Cruce [Santa Cruz Island]¹³² so that you may be shure the bearings are still the same and the bulls no dought are as ugly as ever. The tame cattle are all together, they are turned out early in the morning to a plenty of grass water'd twice a day and put in the corall after the sun goes down; for all that some few of the older ones keep rather poor prefering to travel about rather than stay in one place and fill themselves as the smaller ones do: so full they can hardly walk. The corall is enlarged two fifths and is much better than before when the cattle were crowded and driveing one another about to get more room, now they enter and remain still. A great many of the wilde cattle are down on the mesa and about the olde house; some come in

sight from here. I think by the time this gets to Santa Barbary you will be there; want to hear from you and from home hope you did not forget to send the hundred dollars and attend to the note against Mr. Leon. If you can send me some stores by the last of Dec. I shall be glad; by that time we shall be in want of this list.

2 bbl Flour

Sugar

Molasses

a little Coffe

& *not much* Tea

Pepper

Vinegar

Brown Soap

Matches

Letter paper

Unions

Pan de Dulce¹⁸³ sends for 3 bars Soap, large Needles & thread, 1 pair shoes No. 9.

The Indean wants

2 pairs pants, 35 in. around, 30 long

2 blue wool shirts

1 hat like one sent Luis

1 Jacket

1 blanket

2 pairs cotton draws

1 big Knife

1 pair shoes No. 9

Soap, Needles & thread

3 pairs stockings

Should the boat¹³⁴ not be ready to come perhaps Mr. Kimball might be engaged on reasonable terms he not having much to do at present. I heard you speak of haveing a corall built at the *Canyiada Verde*;¹³⁵ by what I have observed it would be greatly to your interest for many reasons all of which you are aware. Firstly it would be about three miles nearer the anchorage than the olde one, the horses would be handy and in the best grass, & have much more time to feed, less distance to travel, save more than two hours of the mens time a day and be much nearer their place of work. But what I was going to say was perhaps it might be forwarding things a little if I could have a few men and get a corall underweigh there this winter. The bank of the hill will answer well for one side, there may be wood not far off for the others. The men who wer here last summer will know about that or there could be boards draged out from here being but two steep hills to go up and they may be made tolerable easy of ascent. My respects to Joseph, my cousins as well as Mr. Burton & Blake

Remaining yours truly,

D. W. THOMPSON

Dec 9th, 1853

Mr. Kimball has just arrived on his way to Santa Barbary. I have nothing of importance to add to the within;

we are getting along after the same olde sort and the cattle are looking well, better than could be expected considering the distance they have to be drove to grass and water in these short days. There has been a few days of very thick fog, in such weather I am rather short handed requiring all of us to keep the cattle together and no one to look up the horses.

D. W. T.

23

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Mrs. Lydia Thompson
Brunswick, Maine

November 10, 1855

Aside from the favorable comments on the early California educational institutions, this letter is of interest as containing the first mention of a clipper ship to be found in the Thompson Papers. These fast, beautiful triumphs of American skill had their beginnings in the later years of the China trade and found their greatest usefulness in the international race for the tea trade of China after the Opium War and the retirement of the East India Company. In the 1850's, clippers raced one another, amid great excitement, from the Atlantic coast round the Horn to California and to Canton.¹³⁶

My dear Mother,

I returned here on the 6th from San Francisco, where I have been with my Children for the purpose of placing them at good Schools, in which I succeeded.

My three Daughters¹³⁷ are in the Young Ladies Academy, conducted by the Sisters of Notre-Dame in the City

of San Jose, about fifty miles from San Francisco, the two Boys¹³⁸ are in the Santa Clara College, three Miles distant from San Jose; both of these institutions cannot be surpassed by any in the Union, and the Climate has not its equal in the World. The Girls entered School on the 18th of last Month and the Boys on the 19th. I am now quite alone and have only to provide for them agreeable to the Rules prescribed in the prospectus of the Institutions.

I received letters from Francis dated the 2nd of October, he has made great strides in English and will in a few years of Study become a good Scholar. I write him by this Mail which will leave San Francisco on the 20th.

I was in San Francisco when Brother Wilde's Family arrived, Mrs. Thompson, Alice, Charles and Miss Davis; Frank¹³⁹ has gone to China in a Clipper Ship; Mrs. Thompson was a little unwell with fatigue. Wildes was in good health, and I have the pleasure of telling you that I am quite well, not quite so strong as before my sickness, but am gaining fast.

I had the likenesses of my Children taken on the 14th of last month, and sent them to their Brother Francis which went forward by Mail of the 5th; the Pictures are good.

Now dear Mother you will give my love to Sisters and Brother and be assured of my great love and respect.

A. B. THOMPSON

24

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

John Thompson
(?)

November 17, 1861

The impending Civil War complicated the already confused politics of California in 1860. William M. Gwin of Tennessee and David C. Broderick of New York had engaged in a bitter feud for control of California that resulted in the splitting of the Democratic party in the state. After the dramatic death of Broderick in a duel with one of Gwin's supporters, many of the Broderick wing of the party broke away to join the newly organized Republican party, which in the election of 1860 brought an end to Democratic power in California. The state's four electoral votes went to Abraham Lincoln.

After the outbreak of war there was a strong movement on the part of the sympathizers with the southern Confederacy to bring about the secession of the state from the Union and to form a "Pacific Republic."¹⁴⁰

Dear Brother,

Not having any late favors from you to reply to, I feel myself at a loss what to say, or how to begin to talk to you, not knowing your whereabouts, whether in the Army or Navy, only conjecture you are attached to one or the other, if not, you ought to be, like every other Loyal Citizen engaged in the defence of the Stars and Stripes under which you and I have so long sailed and to which we have never looked in vain for protection.

Your last letter was under the date of Jan'y 6th and was received here Feby 11th. You stated Mrs. Wilson

would write to me in a short time, but nothing has come to hand, and must conclude she must have sent a verbal message by some one who has forgotten the message, or has forgotten to deliver it which amounts to one and the same thing (nothing).

The Telegraph communications over the Wires came with lightning speed into California from the East, on the 24th Ultimo, for the first time, and as yet have continued daily without interruption; so you can plainly see, as to *time*, we are but a few hours apart.

I once wrote a letter to our Mother dated at Honolulu, (Sandwich Islands) and She received it in the then short space of Forty seven days, (Which like the Old Deacon's White Hen) was pronounced a *Miracle*; it was made public in the Boston daily Prints and the Firm which I then represented at those Islands instructed me to write to them of the same rout (Via Mexico), My Mother having received my letter, and forwarded the same to her Brother, Capt. Wildes of Boston, one of the firm¹⁴¹ I then was Agent for at the Sandwich Islands. At the time being Isolated in the Pacific Ocean, and no foreign Vessels in Port, I proposed to the Merchants and Residents at Oahu, to Charter a small Schooner from the Government, to carry a Mail to the Port of Mazatlan, in the Gulf of California, to our resident Consul at that Port, to be transmitted by him, to our Consul at Veracruz; there the letters to be Mailed by him for their different destina-

tions, which was done. Each subscriber paid five dollars for each letter he subscribed to send, whether he sent them or not. I subscribed five, for different parts of the World, and sent them. At this time, and for a long time past, a regular line of Packets run from the Islands to San Francisco, with the U. States Mail, which makes it very pleasant for the Residents of those Islands.

With regard to the Rebellion of the South against the Government of the U. States, I can only say with all candid men that it was prepared during Pierce's Administration and matured during that of the Traitor Buchanan, that the South has for several years been preparing to resist the Government when a good opportunity should present, and the election of a Republican President by a majority of the People they deemed, a sufficient cause to make the attempt they have, to overthrow and destroy the Constitution; well; how far they have succeeded is known, but whether they will finally succeed, is the Question. The present Administration when Installed was opposed by the South, denied the Authority of the Administration, and commenced open War by attacking and reducing Fort Sumpter, which act the present Administration very properly resented, and called on all loyal citizens for aid, which it appears has been cheerfully extended. The Administration to my mind has done that which will not only astonish the good People of the U. States but that of the whole World, it has

created a large Army and Navy, disciplined, armed and equipped, *both*, in a remarkable short period of time, and had they taken General Scott's advice and stood on the defensive until the Army had been drilled and organized, no Bull Run disgrace would have happened, but Greely and other News papers Scribblers with numerous would be politicians goaded the Administration "on to Richmond" before they were by any means prepared for an advance. One or two Billions of dollars spent to conquer this Rebellion will have been well invested leaving to us a Strong and powerful Navy together with the Impliments of War we have allready purchased as also all the impliments of War now in the hands of the Traitors now being weilded by them against us, all this will happen in less then twelve Months and two thirds of the Money will remain in the U. States; all the head Traitors must be hanged, particularly the Officers of the old regular Army and the Navy, the smaller traitors never to hold any Office of trust or profit.

I have great and good expectations of our large Fleet that has been dispatched without it's destination having been known to the Public; no doubt New Orleans will fetch it up, if so, I hope Twigs the Traitor General will be secured. The mail will be due this Evening from San Francisco and Los Angeles, and then if there is any news over the Wire we shall be in possession of the latest from the East.

I am happy in being able to say Secession cannot begin to lift it's monster head in this State, many are in our very midst who did their utmost for the Southern Confederacy, until after our State Election, since which they do not own up, and very suddenly are become strong for the Union, making applications for small and large Offices in the Gift of the Governor Elect,¹⁴² but it wont do, they are marked and numbered, and will not be trusted, You no doubt have seen the result of the State Election, it resulted in a complete victory in electing Republican Officers for each and every department, as also Republican Members for Congress.

My son Francis, was elected County Clerk for this County by a large majority; he qualified, and took Charge of the Office on the fourth Inst. for two years, being Clerk, Recorder & Auditor, his Brother Charles Alexander who is in his seventeenth year writes in the Office for him, he (Charles) is a good Penman and one of the swiftest writers in the County, has a gramatical knowledge of the English and Spanish Languages and Reads and speaks fluently the French. Had not Francis been Elected Clerk, he would have gone on the Plains betwixt this and Eautau [Utah] Territory (Salt Lake) second Lieutenant of a Cavalry Company which was offered him by the Governor.¹⁴³ Since his return here from the East, he has traveled some, but has for the most part of his time been engaged in perfecting himself in the

Spanish Language in which he found himself deficient in both writing and speaking when he was confronted by his Sisters; neither has he neglected his English studies by any means, and on the whole he has spent his time and Money here to good advantage for all time to come while he lives. My third Son, Adalbert was fourteen years old, the 24th of April last he was kept nearly constant at School from 4 years of age until he was 9 years and 5 months old when he entered Santa Clara College on the 19th of October 1855 where he remained with his Brother Charles 4 years and eight months, after which he attended School here part . . .

[The rest of the letter is missing.]

25

Alpheus B. Thompson
Santa Barbara, Calif.

to

Mrs. Eunice Wilson¹⁴⁴
Brunswick, Maine

September 11, 1863

Californians were traditionally critical of mail service to the East, which too often had been slow and uncertain.

For some years before establishment of the Overland California Mail in 1857, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company had operated a monopoly on mail service with callous disregard of the needs of residents in many communities. Mail from New York to Los Angeles sometimes took seven or eight months in transit. The Butterfield Overland Mail Company gave good service until the Civil War forced abandonment of the company's route, which

ran through Confederate territory. A new line was then established over a more northerly route, providing daily mail service from Sacramento to the East.¹⁴⁵

My Dear Sister,

You are indebted to me for a number of letters per the Overland Mail, provided you ever received them, of which it is hard to say whether you ever received them or not, as many complaints are abroad against that Institution. And now dear Sister, first and foremost I am in the enjoyment of very excellent health, so is that the case with all my Children who are now all with me.

My Daughter Caroline¹⁴⁶ is here on her second Visit since her Marriage, with a beautiful little Boy eighteen Months Old, they reside at Nipomo, ninety miles from here on the Mail Road where the mail passes and re-passes three times a Week. My Son Francis has been Clerk for this County for the last two Years and was reelected at the last general Election on the 2nd Inst to the same Office for two Years, without any opposition; my Son Charles is Clerk for Francis, who is a very swift Copyist, and splendid Penman. My Son Albert is with us persueing his Studies under a private Tutor. Isabel & Helen are blooming Young Misses.

I received a letter from Brother Wildes about a month ago at which time he had received late news from his Son Charles, who is in the Army, who had been fortunate in the many engagements by getting off Scott

free, he had shown himself to be a Valliant young man up to that date, and it is to be sincerely hoped that he may be carried in safety through to the final overthrow of the Rebels; his Brother Frank when I last heard from him was on a Voyage to China.

If this goes safe, it will reach you in twenty four days, and I request an immediate Answer as it has been so long without any News from any of You, that I begin to surmise you are either all dead, or have Enlisted for during the War.

If this War terminates as I think it will in the complete overthrow of the Rebels and the restoring of the Union as it was, without any Compromise, then I shall Visit my Country and Friends, although far away. I am in one of the United States, and in a State strongly Union, as our Vote at the general Election on the 2nd Inst will show, to Wit, all our State Officers Union, three Members of Congress Union by over Twenty Thousand Votes, in the Majority, over the Copper-heads. Our Voices are still for War until the Rebels tamely and humbly submit to the Constitution as it is, and the Union as it was; on these terms and no other, can there be a permanent peace.

I am quite engaged in making up the Assessment Roll of the State & County Taxes which requires much Writing and many Figures, so You will pardon this until I receive your answer and then I will promise a big

History of many different places and haps and misshaps
etc. etc.

If you have received my former letters please give me
the information asked.

Present my Compliments to your Daughters, to the
Rev. Mr. Pendleton¹⁴⁷ and all our Friends.

With great love I remain dear Sister Your Brother

A. B. THOMPSON

NOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, AND INDEX

Notes

(The relevant works of the authors cited are listed in the Bibliography, pp. 89-92 below.)

¹ Cleland (1916), I, 281-289.

² See Brown.

³ Invoice of merchandise shipped from Honolulu to California by French and Co. on board the schooner *Loriot* and consigned to A. B. Thompson, Esq., Supercargo, July 1, 1833. (Thompson Collection.)

⁴ Although his name is recorded as Benjamin Thompson in the Thompson family Bible in the Thompson Collection, he is invariably addressed by his correspondents as Alpheus B. Thompson. He is listed as Alpheus Basil Thompson in the list of foreigners at the port of Santa Barbara contained in the *Archivo de California*. According to the Thompson family Bible, he was born January 24, 1797. The date January 27 given by Sinnett appears to be erroneous. For data on Thompson's business in Canton and the date of arrival, see Dixie Wildes to Alpheus Thompson, Boston, Mass., June 29, 1823; and Mary Thompson to Alpheus Thompson, Topsham, Maine, January 27, 1845 (Thompson Collection). Bancroft (V, 746) has a biographical note on Thompson.

⁵ Wildes to Marshall, Oahu, January 10, 1826 (Marshall Manuscripts).

⁶ See Mason, p. 45.

⁷ Lydia Wildes Thompson, 1764-1858, married Alexander Thompson, 1757-1820. The family moved to a farm in Topsham, Maine, in 1785 (Sinnett, p. 248).

⁸ Dana, p. 4.

⁹ Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston were the first two missionaries sent to Hawaii by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, an organization established in 1810 by the New England churches. Bingham and his group arrived in Hawaii March 30, 1820 (Bradley, pp. 124-126). The priests sent off the Island were Jean Bachelot and Patrick Short, who had arrived in 1827 to establish Catholic missions; because of prejudice against their teaching they were banished in December, 1831, and landed the following January at San Pedro, California (Bancroft, III, 317).

¹⁰ "Dixey" was Captain Dixie Wildes Thompson, a brother of Francis—not to be confused with a nephew, Dixie Wildes Thompson (see Letter 22), who became a landowner and hotel proprietor in Santa Barbara. The latter was the son of John Thompson (see note 33, below; and Sinnett, pp. 252, 257).

¹¹ Captain Dixie Wildes was the uncle of Francis and Alpheus Thompson. He was a member of the firm of Wildes and Marshall of Boston, pioneers in

the China trade. For an interesting series of letters from John Coffin Jones to this firm, see Morison, pp. 9-47.

¹² Harding Merrill appears later in Letters 9 and 10. He is not listed by Bancroft as the Master of the *Convoy* (Bancroft, III, 382).

¹³ Hannah Thompson was a sister of Francis and Alpheus (Sinnott, p. 250).

¹⁴ John Calvin Thompson was Hannah's son, born 1828, died 1874 in Santa Barbara.

¹⁵ Bancroft, III, 382, 384; Ogden, p. 177.

¹⁶ Captain Young was at this time in the service of John Ebbets, Jr., who had been supercargo of the *Volunteer* in 1830-1831 (Bancroft, V, 782). Sherman Peck was a Honolulu trader who became supercargo of the *Volunteer* from 1833 to 1835 (Bancroft, IV, 770).

¹⁷ Lower San Miguel Mission, generally known as San Miguel Encino or San Miguel de la Frontera, was in Baja California near the coast between San Diego and Ensenada. For an account of the mission and its setting see Meigs, pp. 24-26.

¹⁸ Jones refers here to the seizure of the *Loriot* and Thompson's imprisonment, in the previous September. (See Letter 6.)

¹⁹ Laura Fish Judd refers to the activities of Commodore Downs as follows: "During this summer [1832] the United States frigate *Potomac*, Commodore Downs, touched at Honolulu on her homeward voyage from the East Indies, where she had been sent at an expense of a hundred thousand dollars to chastise the inhabitants of Quallabattoo, for an outrage committed upon an American merchantman." (Judd, p. 40.) The *Ayacucho* was a brig of English registry, frequently mentioned by Dana as the fastest on the Coast. (See note 95, below.)

²⁰ Captain Nye was a native of Massachusetts and served as master of the Thompson ships *Bolivar* and *Fama* during the years 1833-1847 (Bancroft, IV, 756).

²¹ Juan Bandini was the father-in-law of Abel Stearns (Bancroft, II, 709).

²² Following a series of restrictive measures against the Catholic Church, armed resistance against the Mexican government had broken out, resulting in a military campaign of suppression by Santa Anna in June, 1833 (Priestley, pp. 270-271).

²³ The *Ivanhoe* was a vessel that had sailed from Boston to Hawaii, bringing Mr. Brewer of the trading firm of Peirce and Brewer (Sullivan and Leebrick, p. 56).

²⁴ Captain Wildes Thompson was a sea captain who later came to California at the time of the Gold Rush and made his residence here. He had married Miss Wealthy Robinson of Bath, Maine, on September 10, 1834 (Sinnott, p. 256).

²⁵ Dana, p. 81.

²⁶ Thompson to Stearns, September 1, 1834 (Stearns Collection).

²⁷ Phillips, I, 79.

²⁸ Marriage records for this period are in the Presidio Marriage Register, Santa Barbara.

²⁹ Dana, pp. 347-348.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

³² James P. Arthur (Arther)—master of the *California* from 1834 to 1846 (Bancroft, II, 704; Dana, p. 319).

³³ John, an older brother of Alpheus Thompson, was a man of delicate health but great intellectual abilities (Sinnott, p. 252). He was the father of the Dixie Wildes Thompson of Letter 22.

³⁴ Alpheus B. Thompson was supercargo of the schooner *Washington* (Bancroft, V, 746).

³⁵ Charles Hall, of Boston, was one of the pioneers of 1832. He became a trader at Los Angeles from 1833 to 1836 (Bancroft, III, 773).

³⁶ Abel Stearns—or Don Abel, as he was known—needs no identification. A native of Massachusetts, he became a naturalized Mexican in 1828 and arrived in California in 1829. He was intimately associated with the history of California from that time until his death in 1871.

³⁷ Francis Thompson died, the next year, of a fever he contracted while he was held a prisoner by natives on the west coast of Sumatra. A clipping (name and date of newspaper not given) in the files of the Thompson Collection reports, under a Singapore date line of August 3, the death of Captain Thompson on July 14, 1837, at Penang while in command of the ship *Alciopé*. For a dramatic account of the circumstances of his death see Dana, pp. 493-494.

³⁸ Undoubtedly James W. Burke, an Irish trader who resided in Santa Barbara from 1828 until his death. He appears at this time in the Presidio Parish Register, Santa Barbara (Engelhardt, p. 297). His letter of August 13, 1835, to A. B. Thompson is in the Thompson Collection.

³⁹ Not in the Thompson Collection.

⁴⁰ Henry Delano (Don Enrique) Fitch, a resident of San Diego, who married Josefa Carrillo of that town. "Capt. Fitch was one of the earliest, most prominent, and popular of the early pioneers" (Bancroft, III, 739).

⁴¹ Eugenio Arce was a resident of San Juan Capistrano in 1841 (Bancroft, II, 699).

⁴² Apparently Robert J. Elwell, of Massachusetts and Honolulu, who settled in Santa Barbara about 1825. He was naturalized, married a Sánchez, had four children, and died in Santa Barbara in 1853 (Bancroft, II, 790).

⁴³ See Tays.

⁴⁴ Robinson, p. 149; Davis, p. 253.

⁴⁵ In a note from Governor Figueroa to Comandante Vallejo the cause of the seizure is given as "fishing in the Bay without a license" (Vallejo).

⁴⁶ Thompson to Stearns, February 25, 1834 (Stearns Collection).

⁴⁷ Bancroft, III, 365-366.

⁴⁸ It is clear that the *Convoy* and her activities supplied part of the reason for the *Loriot's* seizure. Bancroft lists no owner of the *Convoy*, but Ogden (p. 121) lists Alpheus B. Thompson, along with John C. Jones, Eliab Grimes, and William French as having purchased the ship. For an account of Commodore Kennedy's visit after the *Loriot* seizure, see Tays.

⁴⁹ Thompson to Stearns, November 25, 1835 (Stearns Collection).

⁵⁰ Dana, pp. 261-262.

⁵¹ Bancroft, III, 375.

⁵² Jonathan Trumbull Warner—or J. J. Warner, as he was commonly called—was a trapper from Connecticut who settled in Los Angeles in 1834. After becoming a Mexican citizen, in 1844, he obtained by grant the Agua Caliente Rancho, better known as Warner's Ranch, in San Diego County. (Bancroft, V, 767; see also Hill.)

⁵³ The firm of Peirce and Brewer, of Honolulu, was established by Henry Augustus Peirce and Captain Charles Brewer, both of Massachusetts (Bancroft, IV, 771, and II, 729).

⁵⁴ The *Griffon* was a brig of American registry (Bancroft, IV, 104).

⁵⁵ Captain Little is listed simply as master of the *Griffon* by Bancroft (IV, 715).

⁵⁶ William Sturgis Hinkley was the nephew of William Sturgis, of Bryant and Sturgis (Bancroft, III, 785).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, V, 692.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 539.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 594.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, V, 746.

⁶¹ Thompson to Stearns, October 13, 1837 (Stearns Collection).

⁶² Eliab Grimes, of the Honolulu firm of E. and H. Grimes, was a native of Boston who became a California resident after 1844 (Bancroft, III, 767).

⁶³ For an account of Commander Bruce and the *Imogene*, see Bradley, pp. 305-306.

⁶⁴ Mary Thompson, 1799-1893, unmarried (Sinnott, p. 256).

⁶⁵ The brig *Bolivar*, later renamed the *Oajaca*, captained by Gorham H. Nye, with A. B. Thompson as supercargo, ran into trouble with the California authorities between 1836 and 1839; she was under suspicion of smuggling in Drake's Bay (Bancroft, IV, 101; Ogden, pp. 134, 181).

⁶⁶ Bancroft (II, 745, and III, 575) gives both 1838 and 1845 as the date of the grant. The former is the date of the government order, the latter that of the actual grant.

⁶⁷ Wildes P. Walker was the son of Alpheus' sister Jane (Sinnott, p. 249).

⁶⁸ This vessel was in the California-Oahu trade, making several voyages in the years 1836-1840. Mazatlán was the port of call in Mexico. (Bancroft, IV, 103.)

⁶⁹ Sutter to Thompson, September 21, 1843 (Thompson Collection).

⁷⁰ Hiram Grimes was the nephew of Eliab Grimes and a partner in the E. and H. Grimes firm of Honolulu (Bancroft, III, 767).

⁷¹ Letter 12, in the Thompson Collection, is an unsigned copy in the author's handwriting.

⁷² Robert Ridley was an English sailor and clerk in the employ of Captain Sutter (Bancroft, V, 695).

⁷³ As the Whig candidate in 1840, General William Henry Harrison received 234 out of 294 votes in the electoral college.

⁷⁴ Bancroft, IV, 206.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 191-192.

⁷⁶ Robinson, p. 149.

⁷⁷ Letter of Thompson to Stearns, June 30, 1835 (Stearns Collection).

⁷⁸ The captain of the *Curacao* was Commodore Jones. He brought the twenty-eight-gun British man-of-war to Monterey in November, 1841, to settle claims against Mexico in connection with the Graham affair. Isaac Graham, a Tennessean, and forty-six other foreigners, had been exiled to Mexico by Governor Alvarado on suspicion of political plotting (Bancroft, IV, 38). For a contemporary account of this affair, together with the governor's proclamation, see Robinson, pp. 181-188.

⁷⁹ The *Index* was an English bark of 211 tons and is listed as having paid duties of \$2,776 on a \$2,459 cargo at Monterey in September, 1841 (Bancroft, IV, 566).

⁸⁰ Apparently Pablo de la Guerra, the Administrator of Customs for California. His unpopularity at this time is understandable (Bancroft, IV, 590; Dana, p. 474). He favored the establishment of an English protectorate and was actively opposed to American influence in California. He was the best-known son of José de la Guerra y Noriega, of Santa Barbara (Bancroft, III, 769).

⁸¹ Thomas Oliver Larkin, a native of Massachusetts, was the father of the first child born of American parents in California. He carried on a commercial business at Monterey and performed the duties of United States consul (Bancroft, IV, 706).

⁸² Guadalupe was an enormous rancho of 43,680 acres in northern Santa Barbara County. Part of it is the site of the present town of Guadalupe (Mason, pp. 308-309).

⁸³ The U. S. man-of-war *Yorktown* came to Monterey at this time because her officers were to obtain testimony on the Graham affair (Bancroft, IV, 38).

- ⁸⁴ The Executive referred to was Governor Alvarado.
- ⁸⁵ On the China market see Letter 8; also Ogden, pp. 147-151.
- ⁸⁶ Dennett, p. 124.
- ⁸⁷ Bemis, p. 348.
- ⁸⁸ The ship *California* was an American vessel of 422 tons, carrying lumber in the coastal trade in 1843 (Bancroft, IV, 564).
- ⁸⁹ Don José de la Guerra, the Patriarch of Santa Barbara. Bancroft (III, 769-770) says, "None of the pioneers . . . here exerted for so long a period so wide and good an influence as Captain de la Guerra."
- ⁹⁰ The *Constellation* was a forty-six-gun U. S. frigate in the East India Squadron (Bancroft, IV, 564).
- ⁹¹ The schooner *California* was of Mexican registry and left San Pedro for Mazatlán, Mexico, in December, 1843 (Bancroft, IV, 563).
- ⁹² Apparently, His Excellency Governor Micheltoarena. A revolt was beginning to brew against his administration. See commentary preceding Letter 15, and below, p. 42.
- ⁹³ Mrs. Burton was Carlos Carrillo's daughter Antonia, the wife of Lewis T. Burton of Tennessee. He lived in Santa Barbara, and "Burton Mound," site of the old Potter Hotel near the harbor, was named for him. (Ellison, 1937, pp. 36, 37, 58, 75; Bancroft, II, 738.) Mrs. Burton was also the sister-in-law of Alpheus Thompson, John C. Jones, and Thomas Robbins (Mason, p. 45).
- ⁹⁴ Thomas Robbins is here referred to as Don Tomás, American names frequently being hispanicized when Yankees adopted the dress and manners of the Californians. Robbins ran a store in Santa Barbara and served as master of several vessels on the coast. He later became a grantee of Catalina Island. (Bancroft, V, 697.)
- ⁹⁵ Probably Doña Ramona Carrillo y Pacheco, the wife of Captain John Wilson who won Dana's admiration for his masterful handling of the brig *Ayacucho*. Captain Wilson made his home in Santa Barbara after 1836 and in later life retired to his ranch near San Luis Obispo (Dana, pp. 136, 473).
- ⁹⁶ The text is somewhat illegible here; but a Victor Linares is listed as having obtained a grant of the Rancho Cañada de los Osos at San Luis Obispo in 1842 (Bancroft, IV, 655).
- ⁹⁷ The Victor referred to in the preceding note is not recorded as having been involved in crime (Bancroft, IV, 714).
- ⁹⁸ Bancroft, IV, 490-513.
- ⁹⁹ Dennett, p. 160.
- ¹⁰⁰ Bemis, p. 433.
- ¹⁰¹ Dennett, p. 311.
- ¹⁰² Captain William Alexander Leidesdorff, a native of the West Indies, was intimately associated with San Francisco of the 1840's. A street is named for

- him in that city. He was master of various vessels in the Pacific trade and launched the first steamer to sail on San Francisco Bay. (Bancroft, IV, 711.)
- ¹⁰³ Padre Antonio Jimeno aided Padre Durán in administering the Santa Barbara Mission. Thompson appears frequently as a creditor in the Mission Records. (Bancroft IV, 643, and III, 660.)
- ¹⁰⁴ A *fanega* was a grain measure of approximately 1.6 bushels.
- ¹⁰⁵ The Figueroa mentioned here is either Felipe Figueroa, a Mexican soldier stationed in Santa Barbara from 1830 to 1850, or more probably Francisco Figueroa, brother of the former governor. Francisco at this time was in charge of the Alamitos Rancho near Los Angeles. (Bancroft, III, 738.)
- ¹⁰⁶ Dr. G. P. Judd, an American medical missionary, served as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and John Ricord, a New York lawyer, as Attorney General, in the ministry of King Kamehameha III. Judd was for some time the king's most influential adviser. (Judd, p. 100; Kuykendall, pp. 166-168; Bradley, pp. 159-160.)
- ¹⁰⁷ "Governor Adams" was Kuakini, the 400-pound native governor of the island of Hawaii. He was noted for his policy of vigorous law enforcement. (See Bradley, pp. 198-202; also Kuykendall, pp. 130-132.)
- ¹⁰⁸ William Glen Rae, the Scotch agent of the Hudson's Bay Company at San Francisco, was a popular young man whose suicide at thirty-one over business and domestic difficulties was a chief topic of conversation at the time (Bancroft, IV, 665, and V, 687).
- ¹⁰⁹ Nicholas A. Den, Alcalde (Mayor) of Santa Barbara in 1845, was an Irish physician who arrived in California in 1836 and became a Mexican citizen about 1841. He was a wealthy stock raiser of "excellent reputation." (Bancroft, IV, 642, and II, 779.)
- ¹¹⁰ Bancroft, IV, 594.
- ¹¹¹ The February 26 date of the wreck is Bancroft's (V, 578). See also O'Neill, p. 102.
- ¹¹² Ellison, 1937, p. 60.
- ¹¹³ James Alexander Forbes was a Scotch trader and farmer who had served as British vice-consul at Monterey, beginning in 1843, and who took charge of Hudson's Bay property in San Francisco immediately after Rae's death (Bancroft, III, 743).
- ¹¹⁴ William Davis Merry Howard was a native of Boston who came to California in 1839 and in 1845 bought the Hudson's Bay Company establishment in San Francisco (Bancroft, III, 788).
- ¹¹⁵ An undated copy in Thompson's handwriting [Thompson Collection].
- ¹¹⁶ Bancroft, IV, 216.
- ¹¹⁷ The *Vandalia* is listed by Bancroft (V, 580) as operating on the Coast from 1846 to 1847. It once carried a cargo that sold for \$134,600, having cost \$37,000 and paid duties of \$27,000.

¹¹⁸ Probably Theodore P. Green, a lieutenant on the U. S. frigate *Congress*, which arrived in July, 1841, with Commodore Stockton (Bancroft, V, 577, and III, 766).

¹¹⁹ Francis, eldest son of Alpheus.

¹²⁰ Charles Clayton, a native of England, arrived in California in 1848. He worked as a miner for a year and then became a storekeeper at Santa Clara. He held various official positions there. (Bancroft, II, 761.)

¹²¹ Bancroft, V, 564.

¹²² *Ibid.*, V, 665-667, 689.

¹²³ Andrés Jacobson arrived in San Francisco in 1848 from Valparaiso, Chile (Bancroft, IV, 690).

¹²⁴ See Cleland, 1941, pp. 280-285.

¹²⁵ Apparently the sister of John Wilson, husband of Eunice Thompson, sister of Alpheus (Sinnott, p. 250).

¹²⁶ There was an unusual grouping of birth and death dates in the Carrillo family, all occurring between February 23 and February 28 in different years. Thompson himself died February 21, 1869, of a stroke suffered while he was in Los Angeles on business (*Los Angeles Star*, February 27, 1869). Bancroft (V, 746) erroneously lists the date of Mrs. Thompson's death as 1841—probably a typographical error inasmuch as Bancroft's own notes in the Bancroft Library give the date correctly as 1851. To complete the list of coincidental dates: Alpheus' father died February 23, 1820 (Sinnott, p. 248).

¹²⁷ Sinnott, pp. 253-254.

¹²⁸ Bancroft, II, 743; Ellison, MS.

¹²⁹ Santa Barbara County Archives, Deeds Book, Vol. A, p. 267.

¹³⁰ Letter of June 1, 1869 (Thompson Collection).

¹³¹ In the Thompson Papers is a receipt, dated September 23, 1854, for \$65.50 paid to Louis Garcia (?) by A. B. Thompson as wages for work on Santa Rosa Island (Thompson Collection).

¹³² The island next adjacent, to the south of Santa Rosa Island.

¹³³ Apparently a nickname; literally, "honey cake" or "sweet loaf."

¹³⁴ The *Prince de Joinville*, which later was involved in a lawsuit between Dixie W. Thompson and his uncle, Dixie W. Thompson, plaintiff, *vs.* John C. Jones, Alpheus B. Thompson, *et al.*, defendants, Complaint and Order of Injunction, July 13, 1858, No. 540, District Court First Judicial District, State of California, County of Los Angeles.

¹³⁵ *Cañada verde* means 'green glade' or 'green sheepwalk for stock.'

¹³⁶ Greenbie and Greenbie, pp. 227-233.

¹³⁷ Isabella, Carolina, and Elena (Sinnott, pp. 255-256).

¹³⁸ Charles and Adalbert (Sinnott, *ibid.*).

¹³⁹ Wildes' first wife had died December 6, 1843, and this Mrs. Thompson is his second wife, the former Abby Low Davis. The Miss Davis referred to

here must be Mrs. Thompson's sister. Alice was Alice Wildes Thompson, who married William M. Jordan, a San Francisco attorney. She was the daughter of the second wife. Both Charles Robertson Thompson and Frank Wildes Thompson were children of the first wife. Charles became a brigadier general in the Civil War. (Sinnott, pp. 256-257.)

¹⁴⁰ Cleland, 1923, pp. 350-357; Ellison, 1940.

¹⁴¹ Wildes and Marshall.

¹⁴² Leland Stanford, a Republican.

¹⁴³ Supporters of the Union cause campaigned the state to raise men and money; 15,000 men were enrolled from California in the Union army (Cleland, 1923, p. 357).

¹⁴⁴ Eunice was an older sister of Alpheus, born 1788, died 1878 (Sinnott, p. 250).

¹⁴⁵ Cleland, 1923, pp. 359-368.

¹⁴⁶ Caroline Thompson married John Dana, son of William Goodwin Dana, who had been granted Rancho Nipomo in San Luis Obispo County in 1837 (interview with Judge Melbourne Dana in the *Santa Barbara News Press*, March 12, 1939; see also Sinnott, p. 255, and Bancroft, II, 774).

¹⁴⁷ The Rev. A. B. Pendleton was a Baptist minister who married a niece of Alpheus Thompson. Various Pendleton letters are in the Thompson Collection (Sinnott, p. 250).

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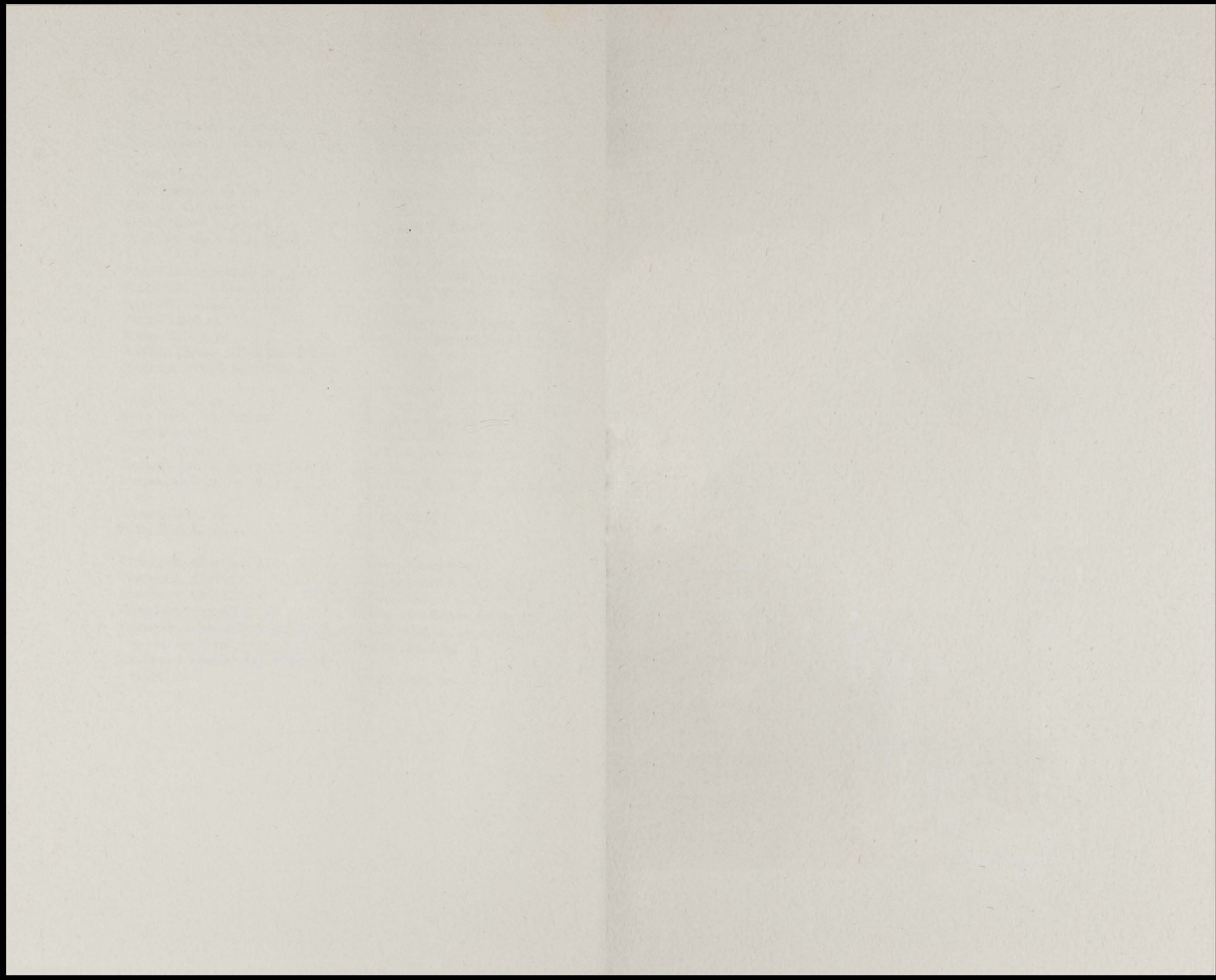
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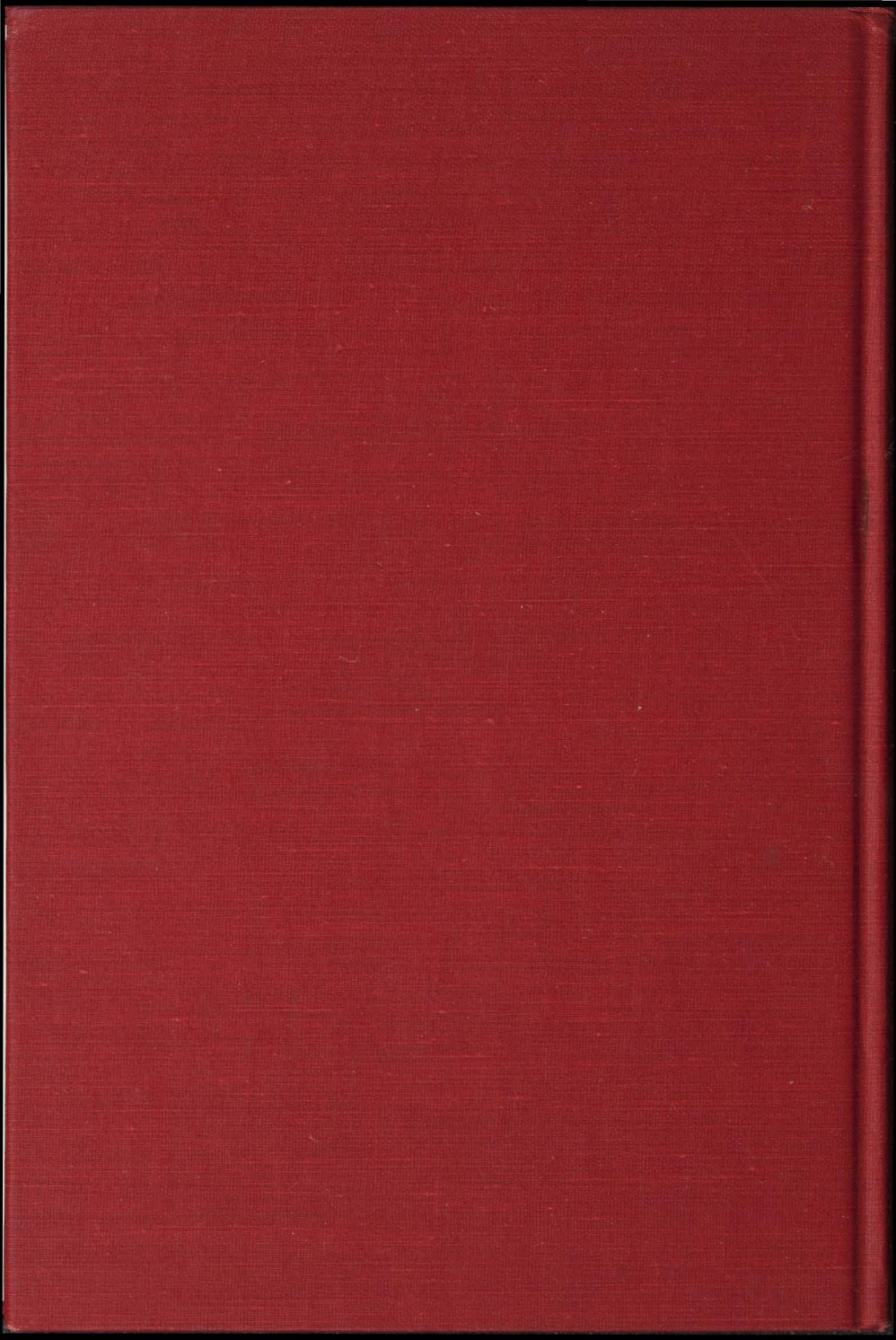
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upon the historic China trade and the emphasis they give to the national and international aspects of California history of the pre-American period.”

Most of the letters are from the correspondence of Alpheus B. Thompson, a Yankee sea captain and trader who married a Carrillo of Santa Barbara and was for many years an important figure in the new far-western land, both before and after the Gold Rush. The editor's notes and commentaries include a good deal of genealogical information about him and his near relations and collaterals.

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